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DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

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by

MARGARET WILSON



JONATHAN CAPE
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DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

This book is fiction and no character in
it is the portrait of any actual person.

CHAPTER I

On a Saturday morning in December, two women far from the land of their nativity had sat down together for a Persian lesson. The unique instructor was sixty-five and Bengali, darker than most women of Brahmin descent, and though years had softened her face, the lordliness of her priestly ancestors still shone forth from it. She taught Sanskrit or Panjabi, as the occasion arose, Gurmukhi or English, Hindi or Hindustani, and now and then she gave a helping hand to some one bemired in Arabic. Her father had begun her instruction in her polyglot infancy. He used to say that a smattering of tongues was good for women, impeding their fluency in any one of them. He ought to have known what was good for women. He had had five wives — consecutively only, being a Christian. His Hindu father had had forty at once.

She sat there with a book in her hand, her wide and racy comment upon each least phrase refuting all theories of retarded fluency. She was dressed in a somewhat Western fashion, in a coat and skirt of dark woollen, and she was wearing English shoes and stockings. She had about her head a sheer fine white cotton veil which fell in graceful lines over the vague abundance of her uncorseted body. From this enhancing halo she beamed out upon the scene she enlivened more like a grandmother madonna than an old maid who through years of grim determination had achieved the distinction of remaining unmarried.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

Her pupil was thirty-five, an American who, naturally of luxuriant impulses towards delights in life, cultivated deliberately austerities and simplicities. It was obviously her habit to comb back her brown hair quickly into an unconsidered coil, but it was the nature of the hair to wave rather prettily against the shapeliness of the head. While she sat there with her eyes intent upon the brown paper book, trying to study seriously in spite of Miss Bhose's exuberance the rubai of the day, from time to time she broke into chuckles of pleasure.

This reading of Persian at nine in the morning was a lapse into self-indulgence. It was almost ten years since she had finished creditably the stipulated five annual examinations in grammar, the syntax, the phonetics, and the idiom of devious languages. There was, too, a certain shrewdness in it. Courtesy demanded that she listen to Miss Bhose for some time every Saturday, and she had concluded to make the most of the occasion by listening to her going on about Persian, the music of which she loved.

It was so cold that morning without a fire in the room that she sat wrapped about securely down to her feet in a green travelling-rug, the hand free from her book resting cosily upon a hot-water bag in her lap. About her shoulders she wore a heavy grey sweater and at her neck appeared the dark blue cotton frock she had donned for the noon, when out of doors it would be very hot. Caressing the hot-water bag rhythmically, she went on playing aloud

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

with the beautiful words, stopping from time to time to listen to the instructor.

The room they were sitting in was a meagre white-washed, barnlike place thirty feet square and twenty feet high, built to be shut tight against the heat of summer from dawn to sunset. It had no windows, but light came in through two large glass double doors opening into the veranda in front of it. Four other pairs, equally large, of cheaply stained pine, opened into the four rooms surrounding it, one pair at the right wall as one entered, one pair in the left wall, two pairs in the back wall. A coarse sand-coloured rush mat covered the floor. Here and there on the mat glared a fierce distorted Tibetan dragon embroidered in bright blue wool on a white felt Cashmeri monstrosity called a numba. Three rocking-chairs made after a model imported from a Missouri farm-house, an exuberantly carved and wobbly Cashmeri tea-table, and a Montgomery Ward folding organ failed to defeat the distances and emptiness of the room. At either end of the bare mantelpiece was a large brass bowl full of golden and deep red chrysanthemums. But on the white-washed walls there were no pictures. For the senior missionary, whose bungalow this was, had gone on furlough nine months before, and Davida Baillie, the Persian-chaunting ascetic, returning from the station after seeing her lovingly away, had called for the step-ladder and had straightway climbed after the pictures that had offended her for some years, had taken them down and carefully stowed them

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

away on the top of her wardrobe to await the desired return. Yes, Davida certainly looked forward to that return, although being lord of the castle had its advantages.

The friends disagreed presently about so elementary a thing as the year of Jami's birth. Davida realized that her knowledge of Persian history was both vague and fitful, and she suspected Miss Bhose of an inexactness chronic and light-hearted. They turned to a textbook of history at hand. They found nothing. Then suddenly —

'Ah!' exclaimed Davida. 'I'll show you something. The very thing! My father has sent me a present.'

She divested herself of the hot-water bag and the rug and led the way to her bedroom, through one of those doors in the back wall of the living-room. Its two outside doors opened on to the veranda. Its floor, too, was an expanse of rush matting. The bed, which was a native cot, still unmade at that early hour, stood near the fireplace that had never a fire in it, along the wall at their right by the door into the dressing-room. At their left against the white-washed wall stood a desk of cheap yellow pine, its flat top covered with arsenic-green felt. Above the desk, close together, hung a number of framed photographs. Beyond them, against the wall, was a bookcase with glass doors, and on the rush mat, in front of it, a wooden box, across which lay loosely the boards which had been its cover.

'Here,' said Davida, removing the boards and the

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

papers beneath them. 'Here is the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.'

The books, of course, were wedged in tight together and only their backs were in sight.

Miss Bhose regarded them with interest.

'We'll look up Jami here!'

'Oh? Are they Persian books?'

'No, English. The English *Encyclopædia*.'

'Jami won't be there.'

'I'm sure he will. Look under P. Persia-Literature. Everything is in these books.' She turned from the heading she had found to look at Miss Bhose. 'Look up India - the Punjab. Look up our town, even. Even Aiyanianwala will be here. Your illustrious forbears will likely be somewhere in them. Look up . . .'

At that moment there was an interruption. The cook, announcing his hesitant presence by a conventional cough, informed Davida that a man was waiting on the front veranda to see her. She put a stool near the box and, excusing herself, invited Miss Bhose to investigation of the volumes.

On the veranda stood one of the very few men she respected - and his name was Jalal Masih, the Glory of Christ. He had on white muslin pajama-like trousers, a white turban, and a coarse natural-wool hand-woven blanket around his shoulders. He was a hungry-looking skeleton of an Indian, created by God to resemble a match, his people said, a born teacher and a man without excess. Although he was a Christian pastor, he wouldn't go so far as to say

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

positively that you really ought not to commit murder. It was his way rather to acknowledge deliberately that perhaps generally, in ordinary circumstances, you might as well let them live as slay them. This restraint frightened his fellow-men. They weren't used to it, and they didn't know what to make of it. It amused Davida continually. She offered him a cane chair to sit on, as usual; but he insisted, as her inferior, on sitting on the floor at her feet. After the greetings were over, he said to her — he had extraordinarily large mournful dark eyes, very wells of quiet sorrow, which he lifted towards her slowly —

'You intended to examine my school next week. Couldn't you go out to-day and do it? My family is ill, too.'

'Is it her ear again?' She knew he meant his wife when he said his family.

'Yes; she begs you to come and relieve her. She can't sleep for the pain. Things might be better with us all.'

'You mean they have had a row again?'

'It was unfortunate.'

'Worse than ever?'

'No better.'

'What happened?'

'What happened before. The women will not dwell in that peace which becomes Christians.'

'Did it come to blows?'

'Not this time. They were — restrained from that. They are all in a temper, and they have taken the girls out of the school. I closed it, therefore, and

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

said it was a holiday. I go to preach to the idol-worshippers for a rest.'

'I see.'

'If you could go, and say you'd come for their examination, they'd all flock back. You might speak to them about goodwill.'

'I *might*. It doesn't matter to me much. I can go as well to-day as again. I can't do anything for Begum, I'm afraid. I was going to take the children these poinsettias.'

He looked at the flower-pots along the veranda less gloomily.

'Are those things flowers?' he asked.

'They don't look like it now, but by Christmas they will be blossoming. They're for Christmas really. Red and lovely.'

'Christmas,' he sighed. 'Peace still is wanting, some places on earth, Miss Sahib.'

'Well, your village isn't the only place,' she consoled him, beginning to send him away.

In the bedroom she found Miss Bhose passionately embracing the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Two volumes lay open on the floor beside her and another lay across her lap. She was bending over to gather a fourth unto herself, but at Davida's entrance she rose, heavily. She stretched out her arm with a tragedienne's gesture towards the box.

'That!' she exclaimed scornfully. 'That's what it is to be a native!'

Davida answered with a careful indifference.

'Did you find Jami?'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

‘Jami! I found Dakiki! I found Firdusi! I found the Chenab, Miss Sahib! Lahore, Aiyanianwala, and my grandfather’s uncle! Miss Sahib, you remember that passage—’

Davida found it at times well to try to take the wind from Miss Bhose’s vocal sails.

‘What passage?’ she asked, with increased indifference.

‘The one the girls in the sixth form read in the history of Hindustani literature. I made a mistake. Where it says there – you know – to explain why the authorities quoted are usually white men. It says the English when they get to Hell quickly set about excavating to see who has been there before them. I made a mistake. I told the children to take that figuratively. Now look at this! I find they write about my maternal ancestors!’

‘Still, we’ll hope that it wasn’t literally in Hell they discovered your ancestors,’ Davida replied.

But Miss Bhose was not to be deterred by any facetiousness from her purpose.

‘I want these books! How can I get some? How much do they cost?’

Davida hesitated. She picked up one volume from the floor and patted it.

‘There are cheaper kinds,’ she said apologetically. ‘This needn’t have cost so much. It needn’t be bound in lovely leather like this. My father gave me this. And when he gives me a present, it’s a good one. As a matter of fact, I believe this cost about sixteen or seventeen rupees.’

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

‘Oh! Well, then I could buy them one at a time, couldn’t I?’

‘I mean – each volume. Each one of them cost a little more than five dollars in our money. But why should you buy one?’ she hurried to add. ‘We don’t need two. You can have this one.’ She hated saying that. She hated always being the giver, the lender.

‘But you’ll be always reading it!’

‘As a matter of fact, it has been sitting there two weeks, and this is the first time I have opened it.’ She felt under those surprised, accusing eyes that she must apologize. ‘I didn’t need it a bit, I didn’t want it. I won’t read it through, you know, like other books. But one day when I was home, last summer, I was talking with my father, and he suddenly realized that there was no library available out here, no book-store of any account, no sort of reference library. It hadn’t occurred to him before. And he went straight out and bought me that dictionary on the desk, and he ordered me this. It didn’t come promptly. It got lost. I told him I’d order it from Bombay if he would give me the money. But he has become wary of late, for some reason. He wouldn’t give me that money. He was afraid I would spend it for something else.’ Davida chuckled. ‘I won’t be using this, not for weeks together. I’ll lend it to you.’

‘Even the story of Buddha resting in our town!’ Miss Bhose sighed resentfully. ‘That’s what it is to be a native! Here I am, sixty-six years old, and there are twenty-nine volumes of books here, and a thousand pages in every one of them! Look what I’ve missed!’

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'Oh well, you haven't missed much. I've got along very well for years without an encyclopædia in my bedroom.'

'Yes! But you had had it! You knew it was there! You knew what you were missing. I didn't even know what I had missed. If I could only show it to the school! Those lazy girls! They have no zest for learning! If I could show them all those books squeezed together this way, knowing more about the streets they walk down than they know themselves, and never saying a word about their learning! Wouldn't you think that would put some ambition, some strength into their silliness? What hope is there of self-government when women never even see the binding of an ency . . .'

When Miss Bhowe began in this manner Davida took firm measures. She knew every tone of her voice after so many years of managing her. The unique, she had often reflected, may perhaps have to be temperamental. Whether there was any necessity for it or not, Miss Bhowe was as temperamental as a prima donna. In the name of the Mission she had built up a girls' school which was a magnificent and, so to speak, a heroic institution. She insisted upon having a missionary nominally in charge of it, for she would accept no responsibility for anything she did, nor would she brook interference in any course it might please her to follow. She would waste no time either in keeping track of the money involved. Her demands in their time had tried the patience of many saints and roused the wrath of the

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

less saintly. But Davida got along with her well, because she thoroughly admired her. The situation had amused her from the first, when she had discovered that she had been born the month Miss Bhose triumphantly founded that school. She had confessed as much to her and taken her place as a friendly servant and a diligent pupil. There had been a time when the head mistress's periodic outbreaks into melancholy had disheartened her. But now she expected her, every so often, to come and pour forth her troubles, to tell how the teachers were all leaving, the good ones resigning, the poor ones about to be dismissed; how the pupils were all getting married, how the walls were falling down, how the Government inspectors were unfair, how the curriculum was impossible; how the small-pox and plague were decimating the city, how the Town Council was plotting to destroy all girls' schools, how her lungs were aching, her back breaking, her eyesight failing, and the country was going from one cursed depth of degradation to another.

Davida interrupted her without ceremony.

'That was Jalal Masih, and I promised him to go to the Flowery Basti to-day. We won't have much time left for reading. I must get an early start. You can take the books home with you. Now let's get back to the lesson.'

They had settled themselves again in the living-room; Davida had begun to cuddle the hot-water bottle, when suddenly —

'Hai!' exclaimed Miss Bhose. 'The very thing.'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

God helps us!' She had been talking Hindustani, as usual, and Davida, as usual, had been answering her in English – so intimate was their relationship. But now suddenly, on her way back to the Encyclopædia, she ejaculated in English:

'Kidnapping!' and opened the bedroom door.

'You can't expect that to be there!'

'I couldn't have expected Aiyanianwala, either. Or Dakiki.'

'But not – general – abstract things like that.'

'I'll just have a look.'

Davida refrained from sighing. She might successfully refuse to discuss the political situation of a nation whose women never even see the binding of – and all that, but to expect to divert Miss Bhose from the subject of kidnapping was useless. For the first half-hour of the lesson Davida had explained at length why she had refused to go and report to His Majesty's Superintendent of Police that one of her young teachers had been kidnapped. The reason, she had felt, was sound. She didn't believe that the teacher had been kidnapped. Miss Bhose resented somewhat her incredulity.

'Lying – stealing – murdering – things like that aren't in it,' said Davida.

Miss Bhose came, undiscouraged, back to the living-room and her topic.

'You consulted Mr. Ramsey, and he went and made inquiries from a lot of men. You know they always say it's the women's own fault, whatever happened. It's simply the evil of their minds that

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

makes them take it for granted that Taj has run away to get married – or not to. How many men, Miss Sahib, have tried to sneak into our school courtyard, on one excuse or another, just to get a word with that girl! How many wait about the corners to see her unveiled face as she passes! And yet – with what chaste decorum she walked along! With what skill did she pound knowledge into the hard heads of her pupils! If a class was getting behind itself, what did I do but turn it over to Taj for a month! If I could have a staff of teachers like that girl, so wise, so quiet, so industrious – with a mind so above worldly things – so set upon the advancement –'

Davida had long ago learned that whenever Miss Bhose got hold of a woman who could teach, she immediately endowed her with an impeccable past, an immaculate present, and an infallible future, in spite of evidence which might profoundly disturb the less pedagogical. 'Certainly she is a good girl!' Miss Bhose had retorted to her detractors but lately. 'She can walk through the streets of this city, the world staring at her, and never look at a man – that is, hardly ever.' And Davida had once been driven to ask advice concerning her widowed and independent young ward of the First Lady, who, being of a heavenly mind, had reproached her for her suspicion. 'Can't you trust the girl?' she had asked. And Davida had retorted, in their great privacy, 'You bet I can! I trust her to flirt with every man she gets a chance to. Why shouldn't she? I did, at that age.'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

But now she said: 'But you must understand that there has got to be some — evidence — some reason for supposing she has been kidnapped, before I can go to the police sahib — before we can accuse anyone. Now we really haven't got time —'

She checked herself quickly. She had almost said *that* again. How could she say she hadn't time, when for months she had persistently refused to know what time it was? On the day of the senior missionary's departure, when she had removed the pictures, she had also packed away the clocks. Since then not even a watch had been wound in her bungalow. When she said it was ten o'clock, it *was* ten o'clock, and the cook knew better than to argue that it wasn't time for her breakfast. John Ramsey, the missionary living next door, who had charge of the Station, was too wise a man to protest about this lightness. He understood that if Davida wanted to catch a train she expected his watch to be accurate. Trains nowadays were as likely as not to start on time, according to some schedule, though for years, when John Ramsey, or even a woman missionary, was to be a passenger, the station-master had never thought of starting the train away without asking the evangelical permission. But now, since the Amritsar affair, things were changing, and a good thing it was, too, in some ways, the missionaries had to acknowledge or deny their Americanism. It's too bad not to share this Indian indifference to time while it lasts, Davida had thought, when she constituted herself the Greenwich of her compound. But Green-

which itself cannot make the sun delay its winter haste in setting, and Davida reflected that, if they took up again the matter of the teacher's disappearance, breakfast would be delayed and she would be getting a late start to the village where Christian peace no longer dwelt, and the darkness of the evening would overtake her before she could get back home. Besides, she wasn't certain that the Encyclopædia hadn't stirred Miss Bhose to unmanageable melancholy. So she offered her the twenty-nine volumes.

Miss Bhose elected to take only AAK-AND and PAY-POL. And as she departed for her little bungalow across the compound, Davida reflected that this was the way she always read Persian – that all her pretence to knowledge was but a fraud and a pose. She was about to sigh for a quiet hour with a book, but she remembered in time that she had renounced literature, fiction and the devil for life and God. And these subjects Miss Bhose explained as well as most people. Davida accordingly went unrepinning to the dining-room door, and called to the cook in the cook-house to bring breakfast.

The dining-room was another great whitewashed emptiness – with a rush mat on the floor and a red and blue striped cotton carpet in the middle of it. The table was large and covered with a white cotton cloth, and Davida at her lonely place at one side of it stirred boiled milk into her wheat porridge and thought ruefully about Jalal's wife and the ear. Every day she had to wish that she was a doctor – though she knew she would have made the worst

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

possible doctor. For the distressing and recurrent pain of Begum's ear she knew no further remedy but a trip to a distant Mission hospital. And she was fond of Begum.

Jalal, that lank and mournful-eyed husband, was fond of her, too. He had married her when she was twelve and he would say proudly, referring to her slovenly housekeeping, that he had taught her all she knew. Davida disagreed with him on that subject. She had taught Begum to read.

Years ago, when Jalal was the teacher of a village just near the bungalow, Davida had taught her to read Hindustani. She was an inexperienced teacher then, and sometimes she had thought Begum too stupid ever to learn. And then one day, apparently without reason, she had waked up. It was as if all her life before, she said, she had been walking around asleep. She had cried suddenly, 'Why, *now* I see what those little letters mean.' And from that peak of her Darien she had gone sailing out to far and lovely islands. She had sung the Gospels through. Never had Davida seen the sacred platitudes — had they not been worn smooth by the centuries? — so deliciously shaken into peaks and abysses. She had gone into that house one morning to find the poetical Begum sitting cross-legged on an indescribably dirty bed, rocking back and forth, singing. And — 'Miss Sahib, I have made a song!' she had cried. She went on to reproach Davida. 'Why did you never tell me this was in the Book, this sweet thing?' she demanded. Her finger was pointing along at

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

words in the Gospel of John, and Davida, reading them, answered:

‘I don’t know. I didn’t know – I mean – I never happened to notice them especially.’

‘I’ll sing you my song!’ her friend cried. She was fair – not altogether low caste – and she was myopic. She held the book close to her face, a little sideways, and with her first finger running along from one exciting word to the next, she began to sing in the quick Punjabi tongue, in which, uncorrupted by polysyllabic cacophonies, thought bounds along in sounds of grace and strength. Her eager delight kept pulsing like rhythm through the monotone of her voice:

‘He sat down by the well.

He sat down by the well and talked to the bad bad woman.

I don’t know why the poor thing had had five husbands,

And another who was not her husband.

He sat and He said to her,

“If only you knew the gift of God, little sister!”

And His disciples came and they saw Him.

And they stared, because He talked to a woman.

And they stared and they stared and they marvelled.

But none of them dared – so this proves He was the Son of God –

Not one of them dared to say,

“Why speakest thou to a woman?”

No! They didn’t dare say,

“What seekest thou with her?”

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

Their evil hearts didn't dare to suspect Him.
He only wanted her to know the gift of God,
disciples.

He sought nothing else of her, alone.

That shows He is the true God of women.

And besides, He used to take certain chaste women
about with Him,

Through the fields preaching –

Certain chaste women! Certain chaste women!

And no one dared to say to Him,

“What seekest thou with any of them?”

They ministered unto Him.

Because He cast devils out of them

They adored Him.

And so do I!

Oh, Son of God, sit by my well!

“That's all!” she had said abruptly, and her eyes
had filled with tears.

Davida had marvelled then at her passion, and she
had occasion to marvel since; because the com-
munity, which can destroy a woman's reputation by
one twitch of its practised eyebrow, whispered that
Begum could not have qualified for the high com-
panionship of the Galilean fields. If, indeed, she
lacked chastity in the rather dreadful and unusual
way that slander said she did, then well might she
sing the praises of it. But Davida had developed a
capacity like Miss Bhose's for believing what she
chose. She never believed anything any man in
India said about a woman. And she would not be-

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

lieve the gossip about Begum, for she loved that little home. She had reason to, for in her discouraged first years she had fled to it time and again. In winter twilight she had fled from the great loneliness of the unlit Mission bungalow to Begum's cosy hearth – that end of her mud-house veranda where three bricks on the clay floor made a cooking-place – and sitting there among the hungry children watching their evening bread being baked – sitting there observing the firelight on their little brown faces – something had risen and cried within her – again and again it had happened – ‘You *belong* here! You have always lived in India! ‘This is home!’ And that exultant temporary sense of unity with her environment – keen enough to make the bungalow on her return a strange place – was to her a very precious thing.

So she sat now, thinking of the ear, somewhat uncomfortably. One thing more she might have done for her friend: she might have given her a pillow. Three days before she had seen her rocking back and forth in pain, her face swollen, her fever high, her pulse – well – Davida had wondered – what *would* a doctor have made of a pulse like that?

‘Really, you must lie down,’ she had said, and she had reached for the pillow to rearrange it.

But the pillow was not one to be punched and shaken into comfort. It was as wide as the bed, like a flat bolster. It was that sort of white common among those who, when they have a penny to spend for soap, spend it for food; that is, it was a greasy

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

approximation to black. It was many years old, and whatever substance had formed the interior of it had long since hardened into sharp lumps.

Begum had scowled at it.

'It hurts my ears,' she had moaned. 'I can't lie down.'

Finishing her porridge, Davida said again, 'I ought to give her a comfortable pillow.'

But Davida had only one pillow left. 'The way of life is wonderful. It is by abandonment,' she had agreed long ago. And she had abandoned the four good pillows which her mother had given for her Indian home when she began her journey to it — she had given them away when she and some kindred spirits — young, all of them, and very near of kin — had married Franciscan Poverty, not for love, but for convenience and decency.

They had perhaps lacked common sense even more than most missionaries. All their first romantic zeal, all their hope and sentimental love, had been quickly turned into pain when they had begun to look upon the wretchedness of India. That five hundred dollars of yearly salary that had seemed at home a joke began, in the poverty of that place, to seem a cruel, alienating fortune. To have spent it upon themselves — why, they said, it would have been like Nero fiddling while Rome burnt. If India starved, they would starve. They would not guzzle butter and jam while others needed bread.

'You have to be very careful of your diet in this climate,' their experienced seniors had warned them.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

But some of that group of enthusiasts suffered still from early experiments with stinging peppers and unleavened bread. They could in no wise blame their seniors for those disillusionments and ruined digestions. In fact, when Davida now remembered those years, she marvelled fondly over the sympathy with which the elders had watched the stubborn innovators.

'I am renting a little clay house in the city,' she had calmly informed John Ramsey one morning, twelve years ago. 'Jesus, after all, didn't come to Galilee as a ruling lord, and I'm not going to live here in India in an English, official-looking bungalow. I am renting an Indian house near the brass-workers' bazaar.'

She was breaking the news to him at the suggestion of her chaperon, the First Lady whose pictures she had refused longer to look upon. When she had told the saintly old soul of her intention, Miss Monroe — can a perfect angel be also a wily fox? — Miss Monroe had looked at her with interest and sighed, and said, 'I always used to want to do that, myself. You'd better mention your intention to Mr. Ramsey, though.'

So John Ramsey, understanding that he was expected to settle the young person, had looked at her genially, for he liked her, and, standing there in his study, he had said flatly, but softly:

'I won't let you live in the city.'

But Davida had already acquired the Mission manner, the air of those who are determined to live

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

at peace with all men and have their own way in everything. She looked straight at him and smiled quite as sweetly as he smiled. 'You misunderstood me,' she said. 'I wasn't asking for permission. I'm simply informing you.'

'I understood all right. I say I won't let you.'

'How are you thinking of preventing me?'

'If you don't give up this idea, I'll cable your father. I'll cable him you are in great danger.'

'I'll cable him I'm not. I hope I can take care of myself. My father can trust my judgment.'

'Dear me!' remarked John Ramsey dryly. 'I wonder if my daughter is ever going to say such a nasty thing about me.'

Davida still smiled resolutely.

'Now look here, Miss Sahib,' John Ramsey had gone on, 'I'll either have to tell the D.C., and he will forbid you to live in the city, officially, or he'll find out that I have not told him and there'll be a row. That man's responsible for the safety of Americans in this district. You know that. Do you imagine for a minute he's going to be held responsible for what might happen to a young American girl in this city? When you are forty, you'll have plenty of time for experiments. Don't mention this to me again until you are forty. Why didn't you come over for tennis yesterday? You must have regular exercise if you're to live here.'

Later, when he had met her wearing in her compound Western clothes and an Eastern sort of veil, he had only grinned and said:

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

‘It’s very becoming, but I won’t be seen walking with you in the city in such an array. No Eurasians for me. You’ve got to be one or the other.’ And when he had heard that she had sold her rugs, all but the most grimly necessary bits of her furniture, and given the money to the poor, he had blessed her, as it were. ‘Try it, anyway,’ he said, ‘and then you’ll be more satisfied.’

So all her bits of money she had given to the poor. Yet the poor seemed no richer for it. The gain had all been hers, apparently. She was wiser, more of a Christian, perhaps. But some way the early dreams had disappeared; the light-hearted band of experimenters no longer really existed.

Some of them had recanted their early faith and thought of it now only when, in their turn, they had to be tolerant of the youngsters making the same experiments. They saved what they could of their salaries now. ‘We owe it to ourselves to have something for our old age,’ they said. Some of them were married. Those owed it to their families, it seemed, to live as comfortably as possible. Some had grown discouraged and had gone home — a very few. Some had grown sociological and talked of remedies for over-population, and sought to justify economically starvation standards of living. Some had revolted from intimacy with India. ‘The farther we live separated from them mentally and physically, the better,’ they argued in disgust. ‘We can’t lower ourselves to get too near to them.’ And one of them — that flower of them all, the one who had seen Jesus

in the bazaar of Lahore — he had died — years ago. But in India, how can you be sure time passes? You open your eyes and look about the dining-room, and plainly it is now and here. But you shut your eyes and see his face, and it is truly then — though maybe it ought not to be. Davida's days that man still controlled.

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He had been riding through that bazaar one June day and there, just beyond the Zamzama, the gun which young Kim was straddling when he first saw the Lama at the corner — he caught sight of God's young Carpenter, cheaply clothed and sweaty, disappearing down the street with a hatchet-like Indian tool under His arm. He had sprung from his horse and run after Him. It was blinding noon, and the crowd in the bazaar had been less jostling thick than usual because of the heat. He asked one man after another where the Carpenter had gone. But no one knew. None of the shopkeepers who gathered about him curiously had seen a carpenter pass. He had gone back shaken through and through by his vision. He had had to tell the missionary with whom he was staying. He said, 'You must have a thicker sun-hat. And you'd better not go riding at noon in the sun until you get more used to the climate.' After that he was silent, until he got to know Davida Baillie. 'But how did you know it was Christ?' she had asked him. 'What made you think it wasn't a common carpenter?' 'It was His luminous head,' he had answered. 'It was His face — not just like a man's face altogether. I sold my horse,' he confided to her.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

‘I told them I wasn’t going to ride in the heat. I can’t ride while He walks, can I?’ He confided in her because she had been talking of St. Francis. She had been talking of St. Francis because books about him had been coming to her for some reason. A friend from the Philippines had sent her the first. A class-mate travelling in Italy had sent another. Some one who had met a friend of Sabatier’s in Paris a third. A Christian scientist in Los Angeles sent her a fourth. None of them cared a rap for St. Francis. She had loved those books, wondering. She had lent them to him. He, with the others of that group, gave what he had to the poor and had taken a house near the Zamzama, in the bazaar. He shared his food with any who came to him. It was porridge of a sort, cooked by a Mohammedan servant who was usually ill and always lazy, and whom he served faithfully and with patience. The riff-raff of the great city gathered about him first—degenerate white beachcombers addicted to drugs, and various sorts of Hindu and Mohammedan youths who thought to frighten their parents into increasing their pocket-money by threatening to become Christian. The curious came, and the earnest, and the unhappy. Politicians came, and editors and students, and young men home and unsettled from Cambridge and Oxford, honoured men of the city and ash-painted fakirs with matted hair; they all came, and they sat on his roof the night through talking religion and politics until it became a kind of scandal.

For he had taken to wearing a robe like a mendi-

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

cant, and he deliberately wore, at times, a soiled shirt – to be like poor Indians – and last of all, and most objectionable to right-minded white men, he went barefooted occasionally and seldom wore more than sandals on his feet. This was held to lower the prestige of the governing class. But, as a matter of fact, Indians, being quite as mad about religion as he was, loved him reverently. They could understand from the ground up a man who went barefoot for his God's sake. So they crowded about him for a year. They crowded about him so pressingly that sometimes he had to escape from them.

Then he would come to the Station where Davida lived, and John Ramsey would put him up, liking him, disapproving of his course, warning him, hoping he would fall in love with Davida, marry her and grow normal. He got to writing to her often. One noon she got a letter. She opened it in the veranda. 'My dear little sister,' it began. A sword went through her then. She went into her room and shut the door. She knelt down at her bed. 'Oh, keep Thy servant from all presumptuous sin,' she prayed. It wasn't his sister she wanted to be. And he was called of God to do what men with wives and children never could do. But God didn't answer her prayer that time. She longed presumptuously.

He got ill presently. Everybody had told him he would get typhoid if he drank water not boiled. Indians didn't drink boiled water, he had argued foolhardily. He didn't believe they had attained immunity from it by having drunk bad water for

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

generations. It was all his own fault. But the missionaries took care of him as if it had been theirs. He really never got over the first sunstroke, they said, blaming themselves for not having warned him sufficiently against that danger. He had been taken home.

He had recovered partially. He had begun writing her again. One letter began, calmly, 'My Blessed Wife.' But people talking about him — they couldn't stop talking about him, those missionaries — said he had never recovered his mind. Mind or no mind, that letter had made Davida a different woman. She had never recovered from it, though the next one, to be sure, began as usual, 'My Dear Little Sister.' He told her in that that he was getting a good many letters from the Punjab, one from Jesus among them. The Carpenter had been having trouble in finding a job, and had gone to Delhi to work on the new capital, and had spent a night there with a young friend named Gandhi, who reproved him for working for the Government. Jesus had defended Himself by saying that we ought to render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things which are God's. But Gandhi had disagreed gently, saying that in his estimation nothing was Cæsar's and all was God's. But the Carpenter back in Lahore was lonely often and sick at heart. And the man writing begged Davida to look Him up sometimes when she was in the city, for there were few there who appreciated Him. That was the last letter he wrote before he died.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

That was years ago then. But the week before the Saturday Persian lesson, Davida, standing in Mool Chand's shop in that Lahore bazaar, with a list of provisions in her hand, had kept turning her eyes, between inspection of macaroni and treacle, out to the street and its flowing Indian masses, to see if by any chance the Carpenter-God among them — might be passing. She knew, of course, it was madness. But it was a madness sacred in her eyes. People still discussed it in her presence. Every year, as the recruits arrived, their anxious elders everywhere would be impressing upon them, by his story, what happened to people careless about sun-hats. They used, some of them, the condescending tone in which the well-balanced speak of extremes. But Davida never mentioned his name, nor dishonoured her thought of him by a syllable in his defence. And she never forgot that she had encouraged him in what led to his death. John Ramsey understood the quality of her silence.

She permitted no one else to suppose it had a quality. But sometimes when her gaiety had all gone and even endurance was at an end, when all the sympathetic life of her had been sucked out by that great leech, her environment, John Ramsey knew how to give life back to her. He would find a moment alone with her. He would say, casually, it would seem, 'I was thinking what Ferguson said one day about this. Do you remember that morning when he —' John Ramsey had his limitations. But he had known beauty when he had seen it in her man,

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

Davida said to herself. And he knew how to use the memory of it. Never too often, never without delicate loveliness, just at the right moment – in the right tone – he mentioned her lover. People wondered, sometimes aloud in her presence, why she had never married. She was a marrying sort, they said. It was restful to have John Ramsey about on such occasions, sitting there quietly understanding why she cared so little about sane men.

And now Begum needed a pillow, and Davida had so far forgotten her love as to hesitate about giving it to her. She had grown cold and gross and selfish, she told herself. She wanted to keep that pillow, so that if a friend came to her she would have a pillow to offer. The poor doubtless would like to offer pillows to their friends. Yet they have none to offer. But Davida's guests would understand where the un-offered pillows had gone and would deplore her excesses, and possibly even take occasion cunningly to remark about the fallacies of asceticism or the extravagances of the natives. Davida's comments on such occasions were worn threadbare. She just always said she admired a woman with all her heart who would live with a family of seven extravagantly on six dollars a month as Begum did. 'I'm sure I couldn't do it,' she would say, knowing she was being annoying.

Or the disapproving friends would ask why Indians hadn't pillows of their own. Didn't they have hens? Why didn't they save the feathers for pillows, as women of other countries did? They

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

would be forgetting the difference between American farmyards with dozens or hundreds of chickens and ducks and geese running about in great stretching fields and eating rich grains the cost of which no one troubled to count, and the one little occasional sparse tamed and gaudily-dyed hen which might be a fortunate Indian child's playfellow. Besides, they would argue, Indians didn't need soft pillows. They weren't used to them. Hard pillows wouldn't hurt their aching ears as much as they would hurt aching American ears. Besides, down pillows weren't suitable for the climate. They were too hot. Besides, if you start giving these people things, where are you going to stop? If Davida was feeling naughty, she would ask innocently, 'Why stop anywhere? If you are professing to give your life for your Faith, why not give a pillow to it?' But that was just wickedness, starting a disturbing argument about phrases. How could she expect most people to acknowledge that the value of love is in its excesses? Perhaps they were right, anyway. Jesus Himself hadn't had a soft pillow. He had nowhere to lay His head. But then, of course, perhaps He didn't often have earache.

Davida's cook brought in the curried turnips. Yes, she reflected — she had been going on conventionally for some days now, as she could go on for a while, hardening her heart against the appeal of the world. But this morning again, as often, she was all nervously sensitive to its pain. She knew the sensitiveness depended partly upon her physical condition, upon the food she had been eating, the sleep

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

she had been missing, the winds that had been blowing, the phases of the moon. She didn't try specially to avoid going off on sprees of pity, of bursting out into austere and futile protests against the nature of things, though often she regretted them afterwards.

What good had it done her, for example, on her furlough, to stir up the wrath of her whole family by deliberately and loudly voting for Debs. It had been the first time she had ever voted for President. No one had even told her to vote for Harding, so utterly Republican her mid-west family supposed itself to be to its remotest member. She had seen the ballot, Harding, and Cox, and Debs. Debs was like him — like her foolish lover — Debs had said that while anyone was poor, he was poor; while anyone was oppressed, he was oppressed. So she had voted for Debs. And then she had gone out and told what she had done; and all the tribe of her family had pitied her father more than ever. It was bad enough to have a daughter a missionary. But to have a missionary daughter who returned to her country and voted for Debs — 'Why,' they cried, 'he's that *Socialist*, isn't he?' feeling that it couldn't some way be true. Her father, the sweet old darling that he was, had started when he heard it and blinked, but rallied at once to her support, and by the next day he was saying brazenly that he would have voted for Debs himself if he had known he had said that. But that only proved to the family what a fool a respectable white-haired Iowan can make of himself over a daughter.

She had finished the curry when she recalled Debs and her father, and she chuckled. She refused to be ashamed of herself. She couldn't blame the Iowans, of course. They, too, were God's creatures, and this generation of them had never seen anybody poor. They pitied themselves because the price of Cadillac tyres was going up. 'But I mustn't sit here like a Pharisee, she said to herself, thanking God I am not as other Iowans are. If they had seen what I have seen, they would be less complacently sure. I'll give Begum that pillow if I have to sleep on the floor. He's not going to be forgotten altogether. It isn't going to have been altogether in vain.'

And then her thoughts grew bitter, momentarily. Was it for this that he had died – that a pillow might be moved from one bed to another? Oh, how they had aspired in his days, together, to make darkness light, to wash the face of the earth, to make India some way happier! And what did it all amount to! Petty ministrations – she washed some baby's eyes, she taught some lazy woman to read, she gave half a lemon to some one with fever. Well, the prophet had warned them. They couldn't say he hadn't. 'Seckest thou great things for thyself?' he had called to them. 'Seek them not! Seek them not!' They had learned his meaning now. Oh, I have learned them all right, Davida thought. And I'll give that pillow to Begum. I'll take it out to her now, when I go to the village. And if anybody criticizes me for it – if anyone finds out – I'll shut them up. I'll say I owed it to myself to give it to her!

CHAPTER II

About noon she arrived in her shaky bamboo cart at what she called the Flowery Basti. Basti is a word applied commonly to the outlying low-caste quarters of any town. And Flowery this accursed place deserved because it was the garden, in more ways than one, of her delight.

'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, cease eating carrion, and you shall be saved.' Forty years before the missionaries had begun preaching this gospel to pariahs when the higher castes had laughed at their message. The outcastes habitually ate carrion, not because they preferred the flavour of it, but because they were too poor to get lawful meat, and because they were compelled to dispose of dead animals so that the high caste might not be defiled. The diet had given them a peculiar pallor which the missionaries were soon able to diagnose. The gospel which they preached had perhaps in its time come to men more debased. But it could scarcely have come to men more devoid of hope. They had literally, in those days, no rights on earth, those low castes. They had to get off the very highways lest their shadow fall on some Brahmin, as they still have to in some parts of India. They had to call out like lepers a warning of their approach to some filthy necessary duty, so that the well-born might have time to withdraw. They dared come into no court room, into no school, into no place of worship, unto no source of water but their own few wells. They could own no

land, and they had given up trying to rent any when no bargain they made could be upheld by courts in which they had no right to sue. The villages round about Aiyanianwala were, of course, more than half Mohammedan, and the Mohammedans theoretically had never insisted upon rigors which originated with the Hindus. Yet practically they bullied the depressed almost as much as Hindus. So that when the first missionaries came to the Flowery Basti, its people never expected anything but blows and injustice from the world.

Naturally, the idea of a God incarnate who ate with publicans and sinners, who held up for imitation an outcaste Samaritan, sounded good to them. So when they said that they believed on the humble Jesus, when they promised first to stop eating carrion, and second, to marry but one wife — this came easy, for they were all too poor to afford two — they were made Christians by sacrament. Their degradation was washed away by the baptism of water, and they sat down, on the clay of the courtyard, at the Lord's table for communion, eating for the first time, not with high castes only, mind you, but with teachers who were the very colour of the Queen and her Government. Their dirty, naked little children were gathered into classes here and there, in the shadow of some wall, and taught to read and write. And other low-caste villages, seeing their children esteemed, came for baptism. They came by hundreds and they came by thousands, more than could be taught or cared for, seeking redemption from contempt, a

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

quest not in itself contemptible. And the missionaries, hunting about through the years in this very debris of life, had come across some rare treasures. Personality they had found, and character, and brains which it behoved them to respect – not in great quantities, to be sure, for these things are rare among earth's highest-born. But they had great hopes of this people, which, after all, they reasoned, was less devitalized by inbreeding than any other community of India. The blood of all the ruling races was in those derided veins – for their women had always been at the mercy of men whose lust no caste rules in the world could restrain. In every crowd of pariahs there were Moslem-shaped faces, long and lowering, or hard and spare, or full and exuberantly sensual, and Aryan-shaped faces, fair and meagre and overbred, with attenuated eyelids and thin, hawk-like noses – the higher the caste the thinner the nose, in those villages. But for the most part the pariahs were very dark, with the broad aboriginal nose; and generations of scavengers' work had altered the shape of their eyes.

For the day that Davida arrived at the Flowery Basti these low-caste Christian women were still going, morning by morning, to remove the night soil from the houses of that village, to sweep their floors and courtyards, and to do any other dirty work that might be awaiting them. Now the floors of the rooms and courtyards were of clay. And the brooms which they used to sweep them had no handles – at least, the shortest possible excuse for handles, so that

the women bent over with their faces in the dust as they stirred it up. And that dust, and the tropical sun, and the flies and the diseases about, had inflamed their eyes and narrowed them, till their very babies seemed to be born with eyes half shut in self-defence.

They gathered the dusty, ill-smelling sweepings into baskets which they carried away on their heads, to dump where the flies live. And that basket which the economic system seemed to demand, conceiving no possible sewerage but these humans, was still the very bitter badge of their ignominy. The missionaries themselves had dispensed with this degrading service by ordering chemical devices from their own country. Their doctors had experimented patiently, but without success, with filtering substitutes cheap enough to be used commonly by Indians. There was nothing left to do, apparently, but to preach that those who sweep a room well worship God. It was in vain. Nothing was accomplished by explaining what honour is given in white countries to nurses who perform these essential physical services for the helpless. It was practically useless to preach that nothing defiles a man but the purposes of his heart. The missionaries had done much for them. A son of that very village had gone forth into the world and become the excellent head master of a school of a thousand high-caste boys; and their non-Christian neighbours thought a long time now before trying any piece of flagrant injustice upon them. If a Moslem landowner nowadays rented a Christian a

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

piece of land and encouraged him to put a crop in, and then when the crop ripened took it all away from him, as like as not the missionary would march into court before an English Judge and get justice for his protégé. At least, one could never be sure he wouldn't. There had been an American missionary who spent whole successful months demanding justice in courts for his clients before an English Judge as mad about the rights of the low caste as himself. All this they had done. But from the broom and the basket they had not redeemed them, and as Davida came into the village she met one woman and another returning from the hated work. Some of them carried their babies balanced on one hip; and some of them had left the babies at home in the care of the smaller girls, who took them to the little school.

Davida seldom entered the village now without rousing herself to a sense of her duties as a circus. There had been a time when she resented this interpretation of her mission. She had turned sharply upon an odious small boy who followed at her heels on one occasion and assaulted him with the statement, 'See here! I'm not a circus!' And he had fallen back blankly, murmuring, 'Well, what *are* you, then?' She had succumbed. She had even got to playing up to the idea, remembering the excitement she had experienced when an elephant led the circus parade through the main street of her birth-place.

The first child who caught sight of her arrival that noon ran shouting the news: 'The Miss Sahib has

come! The Miss Sahib has come!' And they all came swarming out, clustering about her, where she had left her trap. They quarrelled about carrying her book-bag, about walking close to her, about her salutation, which she tried to spread out impartially over them all. Those she patted boasted of it. Those she couldn't pat said, 'Well, last time it was *me* she caressed.' For this was the most satisfactory village Davida had blessed with a girls' school. Visits to it were like love-feasts. The children adored her, and their mothers poured out their gratitude upon her presence because she was a delight to their un-honoured little daughters.

She had at that time about twenty other village schools, but the girls in this village had constituted, for some time now, what every born teacher dreams of — a class of perfect response. When she had first been given charge of that truly Indian institution, she had found half a dozen straggling little boys and two or three occasional stray girls committing the multiplication table up to twenty times twenty without being able to reckon how many eyes four children had. They had studied their primers and first books in such a way that they could recite them from memory from the first page to the last without knowing one letter from another. She had begun experimenting with that village. There had happened to be there, just then, six young girls between twelve and fifteen, not married, or for some reason not living with their husbands, and three or four young wives of the same age without babies. It was a rare

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

group. Alert, high spirited, gentle they were, and she gathered them about her, and she illuminated the multiplication table until presently a perfect epidemic of reckoning infected the Basti. There remained nothing uncounted in the neighbourhood. They knew immediately how many legs six oxen had. They knew how many eyes were in the school and how many toes in the whole town. They could calculate how many times the moon had risen since the King was born. They could tell how many 'fingers' of spun cotton went to make their father a hand-woven shirt. They could figure out how much money would be required to buy repairs for a Persian wheel well.

It was absolutely awe-inspiring, what those little despised females could do in a village where few of the elders even had got beyond reckoning on their ten fingers. And as for reading — just give them any book, and watch them go at it! More high-caste homes than one had formed a curious but safely distant circle about some sweeper's child to watch her read off words sealed to them, because the Miss Sahib had thrown away the books which they had learned to say by rote. She just made up words out of chalk on a blackboard against her knee — she sat on a low bed and they huddled about her on the ground. It was a blank blackboard and she put strokes on it, and they read, awestruck by their power —

'Shoo the flies
From the baby's eyes.'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

Or sacred words from the Book.

Blessed are the meek.

Blessed are the merciful.

Blessed are the louseless.

There had been not a picture, scarcely a printed word in the whole village. She, being their Art, brought many pictures for their school. She brought little cards for their homes. She was their unashamed music – her missionary predecessors had taught them songs not orgiastic. She was their drama. She started the playing after their own fashion what they called ‘dramis’ – Bible stories – the Prodigal Son and the like. They played Jesus washing the disciples’ feet. The pastor scarcely approved of that. They played Salome dancing before Herod, bringing John the Baptist’s head – an old red veil wrapped into a ball, with a ragged red edge hanging over the side of the tin dish for blood dripping. The Miss Sahib had scarcely approved of that. But the reward she got from them was beyond all expectation. She asked once a little frowzy ten-year-old at her knee to explain the sentence she had just read. ‘I am the door.’ It seemed to the teacher rather a cryptic utterance. But the figurative child raised her head casually, and looked out of the open door – they were sitting then in the bare large church room which sheltered them from the sun in summer noons – and answered simply, ‘Through the open door you see way outside, nice things.’ ‘Yes,’ Davida had said, ‘you are little windows to

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

me, all of you!’ And to herself, ‘And I am their one distant view. At least I’ve made them see flowers.’

And she had looked again at the miniature garden that was a part of this blessed school. One of their women had come into her bungalow when there had been on the table a great bunch of red and bronze chrysanthemums. And she had sat looking at them long and curiously and then asked, ‘What sort of cabbages are those?’ The question had been like a flash of lightning over a dark scene. Davida had not realized before that in those villages round about, and for hundreds of miles, excepting here and there a foreign garden, there were no flowers at all. Yes, there was a bit of jasmine in the larger towns, or possibly in some rich man’s remote garden, and here and there at times to be bought of a vegetable seller, the little pink double roses which rich women string in their golden hoops of ear-rings on hot mornings, ‘true’ roses, of which attar is made. And there was, in the dazzling February sunshine, mustard blossoming in the turnip fields until they seemed to be cobwebs of yellow, delicately-shaken lace sewed together by quivering lines of the heavenly blue flax planted between them for division lines. And there were two sorts of prickly desert-growing acacia trees that bloomed yellow. And that very little was all.

And yet flowers, given a chance, grow so gladly in the colder months of that climate. Davida had longed and longed to make flowers grow in villages. But courtyards are small and household animals are

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

hungry and colour-blind. She had had to wait till the Christians in that village had proudly built the clay walls of their church with their own hands, buying the beams for it out of their poverty. It was a large room which seated, on the floor, two hundred people. It extended right across the one end of the courtyard and at the other was the pastor's small house. He owned no oxen, no water buffaloes, no sheep, not a goat, so the courtyard was safe as long as its door was shut. She had led Jalal the pastor one day to the house of a native Christian woman whom an old English missionary had brought up in a flowery orphanage. You opened the door of that woman's courtyard – and it was paradise! Hollyhocks bloomed there like nothing in India. The pastor was persuaded and his Christian sister gave him seeds. He began to dig a little bed with his own hands, but his flock remonstrating took the spade away and completed the task. His people heard him praying for those little seeds – they gathered every evening for family prayer into the courtyard. They watched the springing up. They counted their first leaves. They struggled among themselves for the honour of watering them. And presently in the dullness of that Indian remoteness, where the streets, the earth, the houses, the walls were one unvarying khaki – khak being the Indian word for clay – from khak were we made – and into khak shall we return – where all the inhabitants were clothed in hand-spun cotton gone grey and grimy, or dyed indigo blue, where you understood why the

first purple was called royal, where a red garment was for the rich and swanky, where weddings and great occasions were made heavenly for the poor by cheap rags of gaudiness – in that monotone existence you opened the lowborn Christian courtyard door – and a dazzling wall, a very jungle of blossom confronted you – lordly colours, kingly crimson, imperial scarlet, magenta, rose, pink, yellow. If Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like a mere wild lily, what Potentate but the Highest could rival an eight-foot hollyhock trumpeting out its crimson majesty suddenly in a sepia existence?

No wonder the high-castes began to think the world was being turned upside down. They had had to watch this thing from the first, scornfully, and they had begun to understand that their scorn was scorned by the more merciful. They couldn't deny that the pariahs were becoming more human. They ate clean food now. They worked hard. They sang like nothing that had ever been heard before in those parts. They had a pastor of their own caste whose word was, most amazingly, truth. The Moslems were coming to respect them more, in fact, than their idolatrous Hindu neighbours. There was one influential Moslem in the village who might for sake of translation be called the Chief Alderman, who had justified the outcastes' conversion, to his neighbours, from the first, and had gone on to defend them more and more staunchly. It was fate, he said, that Christianity had come to the village, and there was no use fighting against it. Go and look over the low-

caste wall, any Sunday, he argued, at their church service. Who but the Christian English, after all, dared such a thing? Hindus had no gatherings for prayers at all, as far as he had ever seen. And Mohammed – peace be upon him – for the sake of quiet and decorum had rightly forbidden women any place in his mosques. But these lowly Christians made their women come to the service with their children and listen. And what was the use of trying to fight against a government that could make women sit speechless for an hour? He advised the indignant high-castes to let them alone.

But the garden had been too much of an outrage upon the order of things. One night some young half-drunken roustabouts climbed over the wall and destroyed it, trampling the last leaf into the soil. Still Christianity triumphed. For mark what followed. It was enough to make the superstitious tremble. The pastor rose in the morning and saw the ruin. The whole congregation crowded into the courtyard to resent the insult. And while the non-Christians watched them over the wall, suddenly the pastor stretched out his hand, standing up as he was – in the gesture demanding quiet, and began praying. He prayed in a tone calculated to reach the unbelieving outsiders. He implored God's mercy upon these men who had incurred the terrible divine wrath – men perhaps who were Hindus, and would not dare to kill a snake because it was God. Yet they had dared to destroy the children's garden, not knowing that in heaven these children's angels do

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

always behold the face of the Father, to complain of all the injuries done on earth to their helplessness. He hoped in very distinct words that through the forgiveness now of the Christians these benighted destroyers might be saved from the awaiting destruction. He hoped it gently in very vivid sentences. He entreated God that by the time the garden blossomed again its destroyers might not be burning in flame. Since then it had grown unmolested, and when Davida arrived with the poinsettia plant, early in December, the flowers that were to bloom in the spring were beginning to cover the garden.

Alighting, she deposited the poinsettia in the curious and honoured arms of the biggest little girl – kindly allowed the next in size to carry the mysterious pillow for the teacher's ill-behaved ear, and away the procession started, on a path skirting the more respectable part of the town, past the scummy pond where all castes buried their dogs and washed their clothes – past the potters – where the hand-made vessels were ready for burning, the feminine following increasing in numbers till it was really a crowd turning into Begum's courtyard gate.

From there, Davida caught sight of Begum. In the blinding eye-screwing glare of the sunlight in the khaki veranda there was a bed, a cot with painted legs, and on the cot, a great bundle of two quilts, a faded yellow cotton one with Jhelum gourds printed on it by hand in black, and a grimy red one with Persian tile pattern of the same sort, and from the top of this pyramid Begum's swollen face looked out.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

As she saw Davida, she got up. The crowd surged about her, all talking at once. She was recovering, of course, or the crowd of women would never have left her. If she had still been very ill, some twenty of them would have been sitting on her bed ministering to her. She called to the children to prepare a place for their Miss, and advanced to welcome Davida, draping her veil more tidily about her dishevelled head.

Davida inquiring about her, presented the pillow, while the women pushed wondering near to feel it.

They poked their fingers into it. They considered the quality of the cover.

'Twill be the feathers, then, of some songster from paradise, perhaps?' they asked Davida.

'No,' said Davida. 'The feathers of a goose.'

'Perhaps, however, of a nightingale?'

'No. Those of a goose. Goose. You know what a goose is.'

And then some one arriving cried —

'A goose, you poor ignoramuses! A *goose*! Have you never heard of a goose, even! My uncle in his travels saw a goose. A dangerous creature of God.'

'Your uncle, your uncle, what's your uncle? I've seen a goose myself, when I was younger.' The grannie who made so daring a statement was greeted with hoots of laughter.

'Don't you believe a word of it. What that old mother hasn't seen in the world —' they laughed. They ignored her, turning to their Miss. 'Have the feathers of all geese closed in a pillow properties for

curing, earache, or only this bagful of the Miss Sahib? Are they warm or cold in their effect, these geese creatures? Do you heat the pillow, and how do you lie on it? Does it blister you as a hot application, or is it good for boils on the neck? My husband has a pain in his enlarged liver. Should I try getting goose feathers for him?’

The children now were pulling Davida by the hand to get her to seat herself on the throne they had made for her, a bed on which they had spread a new blue and white hand-woven coverlet to do her honour. They knew exactly how to please her. One of the strange things about this delightful circus of theirs was that she was so fragile that you had to put her bed right at the edge of the shade which the trees made so that the good sun might not get at her back. She said it made her ill. She liked her feet to be in the sun, though she wore great thick shoes tied securely on. She was so rich that she had enough warm clothes to sit comfortably in the shade. She was rich enough to wear red or purple always, but she seemed to like common dark blue – the indigo colour any poor sweeper servant might be wearing. She had more garments, even, under that foreign dress of hers – but really nice children, she said, didn’t go peeking up under her skirts to count them.

As soon as she was seated, the game was to see who could sit closest to her. The tiny things huddled about her feet as thick as ever they could. And among them an old woman pushed her way in and

they gave her a place because she had skill in massaging. So all the hour that Davida sat talking, the old thing massaged her legs, silently, firmly, from her ankle to her knees. Begum sat beside Davida, and the medicinal pillow had been pushed somewhat into retirement behind her. But moment by moment women were coming in, and each one was being told the history of the pillow.

They were mostly dark and squint-eyed and slow of understanding. Two-thirds of them were nursing babies. Each one had on a long loose grimy shirt-like garment, with a rag tied about her nudity for a skirt and another dull rag over her head for a veil, the second-hand disintegrating garments which they got as pay from the women whose houses they swept — the cast-off garments of the very poor. They came wedging themselves into the cross-legged crowd on the clay floor until in the space between Davida's bed and the courtyard wall there seemed not room enough left for a bird to alight.

They might greet their Miss cordially, but they didn't deceive her. Their recent spree of hatred had left them ill-natured, tired of life, nauseated with themselves. They growled at each other about crowding too close. Davida could guess how it had all happened yesterday, and the day before. The women had got disputing about half a turnip, or a fuel cake of dried manure, and being tired and bored, had gone on and on, working themselves up hour by hour into a mad fury, standing each one in her courtyard, dancing up and down, hurling at the

other the obscene reviling that had been accumulating in their vocabularies for a hundred generations, describing one another's ancestors and begettings with such vividness that children had no child-mind left to them. Women in that village were not interested in the mention of possible exotic and alluring sins which so charm Western dilettanti. There was nothing left exotic to them. The whole familiar range of it had been anciently exhausted. And to have two women stand and throw this stale and stinking rehash of it promiscuously over the consciousness of the whole neighbourhood kindled their resentment. It was easy enough to see the odiousness of it when you weren't doing it yourself. And they would all have taken angry part in trying in vain to stop it. The men would have come home from their work, and perhaps hauled the combatants inside some door and shut it. From which they would be sure to have emerged, as soon as the males departed, to go on, hour after hour, till they were too exhausted to stand longer. Then they would have taken a rest to gather strength for the next morning.

If the pastor had been at home in time, he would have settled them quickly, of course, and the abuse never could have attained its maximum speed and fury. He would have gone to them at the first shrieks that came over his wall. He would have walked into the crowd of women gathering about them, and stood silent, looking at one of them, mournfully, long, without a word, till finally, sighing, he would have said, 'How good is silence.' And

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

then after another long pause, while they waited — 'Go into your house and close the door after you, sister.' And when she had obeyed he would have turned to the other. They would have been forced to obey the pastor, with the whole community backing him.

But the more bored with life the spectators were, the more pleasant to be a diversion. As they gathered, Davida cajoled and beguiled them. She patted the babies. She expressed interest in their dawning teeth. She inquired about the coming weddings and asked about the brides who had departed to their new homes. And when she had about seventy-five women before her, she suggested singing. What song did they want to sing? Each of the children shouted for one, so in the confusion, she pretended she had heard the one mentioned which she had intended all the time to begin with.

'Oh, yes!' she said. 'That's a good one! Let's sing about peace. Let's sing how good and pleasant it is for those that are brethren to dwell together in unity!' She spoke innocently. Then she knew who one at least of yesterday's culprits had been because immediately the crowd turned about and threw black looks at her, where she sat somewhat shamefacedly on the outskirts.

'Hal' they sniffed at her. 'Unity!' 'Pleasant! Huh!'

Davida became more innocent than ever, and lifted her voice to begin. She wasn't much of a songster. There were few places on earth she felt

justified in singing aloud. But she was in one of them. And she was glad. She stopped between verses to amuse them. They had to laugh at her. When she got them into something like normal good-nature, she said —

‘Shall I tell you a story?’

It was needless to ask that.

‘I just happened to think of it this morning,’ she said. ‘I read it in a book of the Hindus some time ago. There was a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law in a certain house and they quarrelled. They quarrelled and they quarrelled till the girl got sick of it.’ She was using the raciest woman-Punjabi she could command, as usual. ‘So the girl said, “It would be better to die than to live longer in this house in this way. It would be even better to have fewer bracelets.” So she took a bracelet her mother had given her — she was a Moslem — and she went to a fakir, for . . .’

‘Just like the silly girls nowadays. When I was a girl I didn’t give my bracelets to fakirs.’ She was a forceful old soul who snarled forth this, glaring at her daughter-in-law.

‘Oh, shut up,’ the rest of them shouted at her in jibing chorus. ‘Don’t interrupt the Miss Sahib with your gaff.’

‘She went to the fakir who sat by the grave of the holy man, and she said to him, “Honourable fakir, give me now a charm of such a nature that it will shut my mother-in-law’s mouth, and make her cease to scold me. For her tongue makes life barren for

me.' So the fakir said, thinking, "A charm of that sort would cost a good deal." And she said, "I have brought you this bracelet." And then he said it could be done. And he took some paper, and on it he wrote in Arabic words from the Koran of the Mohammedans. And he folded the paper up into a tiny pellet. And that he enclosed in a tiny amulet. And the amulet he hung on a string. And the string he put about her neck. And he said to her, "My sister, this charm works after this fashion. You wear it constantly underneath your shirt. And the minute your mother-in-law begins to revile you, you thrust it hastily between your lips, and you keep them closed tightly together, thus"—Davida screwed her lips shut fiercely—"never opening your lips—and you hold it there for some time after your mother-in-law has turned from you to her work. And gradually, but not at once, quarrels will flee from your dwelling." So the girl went home full of hope. And when her mother-in-law began reviling her, instead of sassing her back, she thrust the charm hastily into her mouth, and she held it there between her lips, never once opening them till the mother-in-law had turned to her work. And the old woman began again presently, and the girl thrust her charm quickly into her mouth, because she had paid much for it, and must have her money's worth. Each time she was reviled she held it thus.' Davida held her lips firmly shut again. 'And presently quarrelling fled entirely from that house. For the mother-in-law said, "I have at last taught that

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

girl her manners, improved her disposition, and she sees now my wisdom in all things!’

She sat looking at them solemnly.

‘Huh! To say nothing of a bracelet, I’d give an arm for such a charm!’ one woman sighed.

But there was a titter.

‘What are you laughing at?’ Davida asked, more solemnly.

The titter grew. The children were seeing the point. ‘The excellent magic wasn’t in that charm! It was in closing the lips, Miss Sahib. Don’t you think it was in the closing of the lips?’

‘I do, certainly I do. She wasted her bracelet. The fakir got the best of it. The real magic of that charm is a Christian worth. Jesus had one like that. He knew about it. They used to provoke Him vehemently, to speak of many things, the Gospel says so. But no. He held His lips shut, thus. He held His peace. That’s the way to hold it. After all, you know, you can’t grab Peace by its tail, or seize it by its hind leg. You hold the peace of your mind with your lips. That is, some people do. If they prefer peace.’

‘Um, um!’ they assented, again looking scornfully at the culprits.

‘And at Christmas time, of course, it would look funny to see Christians lacking peace, when they’re supposed to be celebrating the birthday of the very Prince of Peace. But it takes patience and strength to have always the magic charm about with you. That’s why they say a meek and quiet spirit is

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

of great price, you know – especially for women.’ She was at her best then, cajoling them – they had no way of resisting.

‘And this plant,’ she said presently, ‘is a plant of peace. It blossoms for the Great Day.’ They called Christmas that.

‘But how does it know when the Great Day is?’ one small thing piped up.

‘Idiot, keep still!’ her superior little neighbour sneered. ‘How do *you* know when the Great Day comes!’

‘It seems to know, all right. It blossoms just in time.’ Why shouldn’t she say that to them, who had endowed each hollyhock with human wisdom, calling them by familiar names, Tom, as it were, and Sam and Billy, watching them race to get taller than each other, as they would have watched boys running. It was so easy to deceive – just a little – those who are by nature altogether gullible. Davida often envied Paul his ability to say he had taken none of his converts by guile. She couldn’t say as much for herself, certainly. This very school had been boosted along in its perilous infancy by a trick. The chief Moslem alderman, a bluebeard who sought by dye to hide his age – had come to see what she was doing there, when she had started it, not approving of her – wanting perhaps to interfere. He came into the courtyard where she sat with the women and said he was thinking of sending his granddaughter to her school. The women thought it was an insulting joke. ‘If you are wise enough to have a girls’ school,

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

answer me now one question, out of your wisdom and kindness.'

She had an impulse to order him away. She thought better of it.

'What's the question?' she asked coldly.

'There are always some pieces over when you make a thing, aren't there, now? When God made the world in six days, what did He do with the pieces that were left over?' That ought to floor a mere female, certainly.

But she thought of the answer with a chuckle. She couldn't resist it. The Himalayas were gleaming white and cold on the distant horizon. She turned her hand palm upwards towards them, Punjabi fashion, and said carelessly:

'There they are, there are the pieces.'

The Government's religion, it seemed, could do more for women than keep them silent. He was aghast at so conclusive a proof of her omniscience. He even sent his little granddaughter for some days to that pariah school, but his women-folk made such an unearthly row about it that he had to give it up.

And now — well — she knew it was the pathetic fallacy of course, but she didn't know exactly how pathetic it was to be in this case.

'This plant,' she went on thoughtfully, 'is a very good Christian plant, rejoicing much in peace. And it says to itself, "I will grow and grow and grow, and I will be red, red for the Great Day, for joy that there is to be peace instead of wars and fighting." I knew you were a peaceful lot. I knew this plant

would be happy and thrive in the school. But if – by any chance – I don't suppose it is really necessary to mention this to you, even, but if at this time of the year, there should be a – well, unpleasantness – strife – you know –'

'Ah, *we* know!' some one broke in sarcastically.

'Well, in that case, this plant' – she did hesitate a bit just there. She saw it was impressing them – and she paused.

'Will be blasted and withered away,' a little girl finished for her solemnly.

They were silent. They looked curiously at it.

'Will it really be blasted and wither away?' they asked.

'It will certainly be very – unhappy. It might cry – at night, when you can't see it.'

'Might it really?'

'It *might*, I said. I – have never tried the effect of a good fight on a poinsettia myself. I wouldn't dare to.'

'You'd better take it home with you. This is no place for it.'

Some one also asked –

'Does even swearing disagree with it?'

'It flourishes more under kind words.' She felt comparatively safe. It was unlikely that there would be another outbreak of Billingsgate before Christmas.

They had prayer. Every woman present urged Davida to have supper with her. Then some of them went to their housework, to get some spinning

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

done before cooking supper, and some drew nearer to tell the Miss of their aches and pains and sorrows, to get eye medicine.

An hour later, escorted by a following of little girls, Davida started down the khaki lane that divided the basti from the town. When she passed a certain courtyard on the Moslem side, the door of it happened to be open. It was the house of the chief alderman, and his wife had been waiting for her to pass, to confront her with the usual abruptness.

'Finished with your precious sweepers, Miss Sahib? I suppose you haven't time to spare for a poor woman like me.'

'You don't want to see me anyway. You're busy.' It was after four then, and Davida, looking towards the cooking place, could see the minor wife hulling rice in a sort of mortar in the clay of the floor.

'Now don't try to make excuses like that. Come on in! You wait outside, you imps,' she said imperiously to the small girls. She wasn't a woman to have to repeat an order to low-castes. 'I've got a pain in my stomach to tell you about. Besides, I want to know—were you taking those sweepers some more flowers?'

'I took the Christians another flower.'

'A flower of peace, huh?'

So the news of that plant had already spread?

'Yes, a sort of flower of peace.'

'Well, all I can say is, they need it.'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'Well, all I can answer is that they're not alone in their need.'

The old woman chuckled. She knew what Davida meant. She was a woman herself of notoriously bitter tongue: she had, moreover, a household usually in arms against her. Davida knew that she derided the sweepers the more because her husband championed them.

'Did you hear about their fight yesterday?' She challenged her now.

Davida smiled. 'Is your daughter-in-law back yet?' she asked.

And the old wife laughed. That girl had left her in a fury.

'Stay to supper,' she urged. 'You revive my youth.'

'What are you having? Anything good?'

'Not such a feast, of course, as your pariahs would give you. But still, we do sustain life on it. Would you chew some sugar-cane? Oh no - you like popcorn. Here!' she called domineeringly to the minor wife, 'go and get some corn popped for the Miss Sahib.'

'Your kindness never weakens, Lady,' Davida interrupted. 'I haven't time to eat sugar-cane in your house, for it interferes with the speech by which I defend myself. I have been given a bag full of popcorn for the ride home.' She showed her book bag stuffed full, as usual, of food of a sort. Sweepers might be poor, but they couldn't be too poor to try to refresh their Miss Sahib. 'I have drunk milk with

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

my friends. Now I crave permission, humbly, to depart to my dwelling.'

'Far be it from me to suppose I'm important enough to detain a Miss, being only a Moslem.' And she signified her caller's dismissal genially. Davida enjoyed a little tilt with her, in passing, but she knew that a longer visit would have meant eating continually.

As she went out to her cart she got half a dozen more sincere enough invitations to supper from the Moslem women whom she passed in the street, for in villages like that one, high-caste women who sometimes have to work in the harvest fields, go about the street, if they really must, not thickly veiled. But after being a circus for four hours, a lonely room in a bungalow was a thing to crawl into gratefully. Davida no longer hankered after a house in the native city, to 'get nearer' Indians. Her problem was now — how occasionally to get away from them.

For they were all about her, always. To be sure, she ate her dinner that evening alone in the fireless whitewashed dining-room. But immediately afterwards the Christian part of the staff of Miss Bhose's school gathered into the sitting-room. Miss Bhose, as the head, had the rocking-chair of honour. Next to her, in the circle of the firelight, sat an elderly Scripture teacher who had lost eight children, one after the other, not in infancy, but half-grown, of various diseases. And next to her, on the floor, sat a perfectly beautiful young teacher, the grand-

daughter of a Rajput convert, who traced his descent, as it were, not back to Adam only, but directly to the Sun, and of a caste whose oldest child is always a son. This is easy, if you have no scruples about getting rid of daughters. And then crowded together before the fire to look on one book, sat three young Christian women whose parents were among those pariah children the early missionaries had hauled from the dung heaps. They were all good teachers, in a way, with diplomas from the Government training school for women teachers. Behind them on a chair sat a modern, aggressively political Bengali Christian woman with a University degree, and near her a Hindu widow who was, to all intents and purposes, a Christian. There was not one of those women whose history was not amazing, to speak carefully. But they were so used to strange histories that they scarcely stopped to marvel over the very strange history of the woman who sat at Davida's feet. Besides they knew it but vaguely.

They were sorry for her, of course. They said she had had hard luck. She sat warily between Davida and the wall, huddled down in her warm corner, not one of the staff, a little black, stupid, blinking person, eighteen, perhaps, and not far from death. The dying sister, they called her, in Punjabi, out of her hearing, and they were careful to see that she had an encouraging arm to cling to, coming from her room off the veranda of Davida's bedroom. In her childhood she had been given unseen to some man in marriage, of her own inferior Hindu caste —

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

she couldn't tell how old she had been then – and when he lifted her veil and saw her dark, unlovely face and that hand of hers which was deformed, he had cried out that he had been cheated in the bargain and had struck her such a blow that she fell down. And presently he had passed her on, unseen, to a man to whom he owed money. And that man, seeing her, had kicked her into a corner, but kept her awhile. He was a gambler and, having lost all he had, he staked her, at length, in a game of dice. And the winner had sold her to a man who put her into an inspected house of prostitution in a great cantonment. And when she had become too diseased to serve longer there, they had sent her to a Government hospital to die.

Now at some time in her bruised career, she had seen a missionary. And lying in that hospital she had persuaded a sweeper to take a message to whatever woman missionary there might be. Presently a white-haired American woman of the city got that cry for help and came to listen to her prayer. She got the required official form to be filled in and sought out the English officer in charge for his signature. He happened to be a very young Sahib, newly arrived from the green and pleasant land, and he seemed not to have known of this power of his. She had difficulty in explaining to him what she wanted. And when he understood, 'I never saw a boy blush so red in all my life,' she told Davida. He asked her what she intended doing with the woman. She only asks to be allowed to die decently away

from that place, she told him. And he signed the slip hurriedly and said, 'Take them all! I'll give them all to you.' Afterwards that rescuing missionary had gone home on furlough and entrusted her ward to Davida. So there she was, sitting by the fire. And that house of women seemed to surprise her more than anything in her career. If one turned quickly to her, even now, she shrank back to avoid being struck. 'Make a Christian of me by water,' she had pleaded. She had never been high-caste, and she had long ago lost what caste she ever had, and so though the baptizing of a Hindu-born woman always stirred up a fuss, John Ramsey had baptized her there, in that meeting of the staff, one evening. 'Let the city get furious about it! I'll talk to them,' advised the aggressive Miss Bhose. She had encouraged her in her intention to make a will, as it were, leaving all her property to Davida. The estate consisted, as it appeared later, of two bracelets. They were worth eight cents.

Now for this circle, which varied from evening to evening, any woman who had no place else to go being a member of it as a matter of course, Davida had a fire lit in the sitting-room fireplace. That was because she was rich — of those rich ones whose habit it is to burn up wood solely for heat, without cooking anything with the fire.

But her wood was not burning in vain, Davida reasoned. It was warming hearts and opening up cold minds. It was a religious meeting the staff was having, of course, for wherever two Indians meet,

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

there is a religious meeting. They talked of their pupils, of the approaching exams, of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Miss Bhose passing from hand to hand a volume opened at the article on Aiyanianwala. But they inevitably came back to the subject of greatest interest to them, the fate of the dear and missing teacher.

Not that Taj had often been at the meetings of the staff. She lived a mile away with her widowed old mother in one of the city bastis. The sweepers of a city always seem a few degrees more abject and more degraded than those of the villages. And the basti Taj insisted, for some reason, on living in, was sickening, shadeless, ill-smelling, like an over-heated slaughter-house. The alley by which she left the house of her fathers to go to the high-caste school had usually the dripping steaming skins of discarded animals hanging like banners along it. In the early days missionaries who ventured into that quarter had had to bathe and change their clothes before entering the house of respectable people. Yet now every day until her disappearance this Taj, hardly more of a mystery to Davida now than before, walked past the warm horrible skins straight into her class of high-caste children, to receive their loving morning salutations.

Bare-faced and unashamed she walked, morning after morning, out of her home down through those hostile high-caste streets like a lithe young Grecian Victory, her adoring old mother hurrying along to keep pace with her. Step by step, as she walked, she

was trampling the conventions underfoot with the serenity and safety of an earlier saint walking over red-hot ploughshares. She had a power, a character, a charm, that made her to Davida a problem as bewitching as baffling. Her mother was fair. She was not very fair, but she had a thin Aryan nose, and a pretty ruddiness in her cheeks. The other Christian teachers in the school wore always the imitation western costume, a dowdy skirt and coat, or a one-piece dress distressingly unbecoming. They loved it, they rejoiced in it, because it was the costume of free women, of women who go forth into the world independently, to work, to earn their living. The English had made the costume of their women so respected that it was a protection to Indian women even to imitate it, Miss Bhose held. And the donning of it gave them permission to cast aside all veiled Indian decorum, and to walk as barefaced as decent white women. But Taj, in spite of Miss Bhose's suggestion, stuck to her native dress, to a costume designed to reveal the charm of women to intimate eyes rather than to screen them from strange ones. And decent women who wore it in the purdah of their homes, when they ventured abroad, wrapped and swaddled themselves about with bourquas, and great thick folds of draperies which made the identification of them difficult if not impossible. There were, to be sure, women who went about the street beautifully clothed after this fashion and unveiled, but they were prostitutes. And there were some who went about so dressed the sheer filth of their gar-

ments. proclaiming their respectability. But they were old servants or sweeper women or villagers. And for the most part their garments were unlovely, devoid of grace, or even deforming, trousers like great billowing plus-fours extending to the feet.

But Taj, unconsciously, managed her garments better. She shaped them just a little at her slender ankle, — which made men turn and look after her. She skimped them a bit about the knee, so that the shapeliness of her legs wasn't hidden altogether, — which made eyes bold. 'You know what men are,' she would say, shrugging the palms of her hands with fine Christian resignation. She shifted just a bit of the fullness about her hips. And if young men about town loitered about certain streets to see her pass she never looked towards one of them — except perhaps now and then at some very distinguished one of them. If her elders expostulated — 'Oh, you wouldn't have me go veiled like a Moslem, would you?' she would protest, shocked. When they remonstrated that she might walk somewhat less challengingly, she would reply grieved, 'I suppose you want me to shuffle along like a Hindu widow, with my head sunk between my shoulders, like this. I'm a Christian, thank you. I'm not ashamed of being alive.' So on she went, persisting in her unconscious effect — it must have been partly unconscious, for she had never seen herself in a full-length mirror — with her garments clinging like soft Greek draperies to her delicious body, so beautifully poised and alert. The sleeves of most

women's shirt-like garments hung loosely to an awkward length between elbow and wrist. Taj lengthened hers and drew them in at the wrist with a little design of smocking she had learned at the mission boarding-school. The result was that her rich little Hindu pupils, when their infant trousseaux were planned, sulked and stormed at home until the conventional designs of the centuries were abandoned for this new fashion – set by whom? the disgusted grandmother might inquire suspiciously and learn to her horror that it was 'by that little dripping from the dung basket that taught in the mission school' – so degenerate was this age. And when in disgust the elders came to investigate the scandal at its source, they went away conquered – more or less. Taj knew how to disarm them. She knew how to disarm anybody. She was a disarmer by instinct.

Soon after she had begun teaching in the city school, the mother of one of her pupils had come furiously into Davida's office one morning to demand redress, a mighty woman and a coarse one, with stiff silken clothing, and thousands of rupees worth of thick gold bracelets weighing down her arms.

'I sent my daughter to your school in good faith. And what is this I hear? Scandalous teachings you give her – horrible! Do you then advocate murder? I want to know.'

Davida said cautiously:

'We don't pretend to be vegetarians, you know.'

'It's not that. You commanded the child to take life. This low-caste teacher saw lice on her veil, and sent her out into the street to shake it.'

Davida sent for Taj. And Taj came, and stood before her accuser. Her manner — where did she get that? Davida wondered then, as always. From what blood came that dignity, that unpretentious deference? 'I'm a sweeper from the basti, you know,' her posture seemed to say, meekly — before anyone had time to taunt her with the fact. When Indian women are gentle they are gentle in a manner surpassingly charming and lovely. Taj was gentler than them all. And on that occasion being questioned she had spoken softly as usual. Most of the teachers, after years of trying to speak louder than three hundred children studying aloud, spoke naturally raucously. Taj's voice was a little quiet brook in a lonely place. She said humbly, seriously — 'Great Lady, it is indeed true that I advised her to shake her veil into the street. But that was for her religion and for mine. So you must forgive me. Because I knew she belonged to the great caste which takes no life. And your men, I know, go into the bazaar and buy up the little caged quails, and the sheep offered for slaughter, and turn them loose to live. Now in the same way it is not the teaching of my religion, or this honourable Miss Sahib's, that a girls' school is the best place for God's little lice. For this reason, to please God, I advised her to set them free in the street, to work out their salvation there. We must do what we can to conciliate Him.'

The woman, studying Taj steadfastly, cried, after a moment:

‘Are you married?’

‘Alas, I am a widow,’ said Taj, as if she regretted the fact.

‘What a shame! A tongue like that, and no lord to beguile! May my child pick up its tricks! I don’t care what you teach her, you understand. It’s her silly old fool of an orthodox father who made all the fuss. He made me come here to complain.’ Turning to Davida – ‘My idea is, now that I’m here, to sit down and talk a long time with you.’

Her back was turned towards Taj. And that naughty young tearless widow slipping out, in the doorway turned to Davida, gave her a long, knowing, commiserating Western wink and vanished. When later Davida went to her classroom, she found her discussing, with her algebra class listening intently, the advantage of small dainty ear-rings over great hoops of gold. And –

‘Set them a few problems! Examine them!’ she had begged – knowing how thoroughly prepared they were. ‘They are such clever girls.’ All girls were clever – in her classroom.

No wonder Miss Bhowe was bemoaning her with an overflowing heart. And Davida felt herself in an awkward position. To say aloud what she thought, that Taj had probably gone and got married, would have been in the eyes of the staff to make a very nasty cattish remark. For marriage these women scorned as a contemptible compromise with the lusts of the

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

flesh. From their infancy up they had heard it called sin, or evil, or for a change, putrescence. Why should they marry when they could earn a decent living otherwise? Davida often had occasion to expostulate with them because they were in her charge, and it was to her that their suitors made application. For Taj suitors often made application. Davida had in one post received three proposals for her. Her mother, too, was always begging Davida to compel her to marry again, before her youth was past. But Taj in her twenty years had been married once, and had had two children who had died. On one occasion when Davida threatened her – ‘You mark my word. If you don’t marry, you’ll be sorry! I never saw a woman yet who wasn’t’ – Taj had glanced softly at her out of the corner of her naughty eye, and remarked – ‘That’s the one way in which you don’t seem to practise what you preach, Miss Sahib.’ ‘I do practise,’ Davida had retorted. ‘I say I’m sorry!’ But Taj persisted. ‘I won’t marry, now,’ she always said. Gentle, she was, but firm as a rock.

And now Miss Bhose was saying that Davida really ought to go to the Police Sahib, because Taj’s silly old mother, in her frenzy, had already been to report to his underlings. And whatever fate had befallen the girl, it could scarcely be worse than being reported to the vicious, the corrupt, the evil-minded police. The adjectives were Miss Bhose’s own.

For the police never did anything but harm to any woman, and if they got a chance to spoil the reputa-

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

tion of a teacher in the mission school – for once in their lazy lives they would bestir themselves. Between the local police inspector and the head mistress there had been an unpleasantness ever since the day she had assaulted – they said – and murderously beaten four policemen in the discharge of their duty. The affair had been hushed up, finally. But naturally Miss Bhowe was arguing with Davida that there was no use hoping for any help from the native police. She must appeal herself to the English Inspector, or get the Sahib to appeal. The teachers all urged the course upon Davida. They recalled rumours of woman-stealing. Davida expressed her doubt about the truth of them. Suddenly the little Rajput teacher, pointing with her chin prettily to the dying sister, said to Davida.

‘That one can tell you about them, Miss Sahib. Ask her if you don’t believe me.’ And then, to the sister, ‘Tell her what you told me this afternoon.’

All the eyes turned curiously towards her. And her stupid, blinking eyes turned in fear towards the veranda door, towards the dining-room door.

‘I don’t know anything. I don’t understand.’

‘I say, tell the Miss Sahib what you told me this afternoon.’

‘I didn’t tell you anything.’

‘You started to.’

‘No, I didn’t. I don’t know anything.’

‘Yes, you did! When we were standing there at the well. You said . . .’

‘No I didn’t!’

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

Now, Davida, seeing her discomfort, made a sign to the teacher to let the matter drop. But to Miss Bhoose it was of primary importance.

'What did you say? What did she say?'

'She said they beat her. She said . . .'

The dying sister appealed to Davida. 'My head aches, Miss Sahib. I want to go to bed. How could I say anything? I don't know what she's talking about.'

'Don't be afraid. It isn't anything,' Davida consoled her. 'Let her go to bed, if she wants to.'

But the teacher was annoyed to be so contradicted.

'Sister,' she began gently, 'weren't you standing there by the well, when they loosened the ox from the wheel — this afternoon? Weren't we just talking there about it when the cook's baby toddled out almost under the ox's feet? Didn't I just interrupt you to shout to him to get out of the way —'

'I didn't know the cook had a baby.'

The teacher said, somewhat shortly:

'Well, it was his grandson, then. But weren't you saying that kidnappers —'

'No, I wasn't. *I wasn't*. I didn't understand you. I am an ignorant woman. My head gets confused with learning. I want to go to bed.'

No sooner had the door shut behind her than Miss Bhoose pounced upon the Rajput.

'Tell me at once what she said!'

'Well, she's a nice one! Of course she remembers what she said. We were talking, and she sort of cried out. "Hi!" she said, like that. "They beat

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

you. You can never get away from them. They twist you if you cry out." Like that, she said it. Or almost those words. And then along came the ox, and we had to grab the baby, and I took it to its mother, and then I went to get my supper, and didn't think any more about it. But she said it, right enough. She wanted to forget it, that's all.'

Davida spoke with some spirit.

'Naturally, she wants to forget it! It's not kind – it's not right – to ask her about all her troubles! You mustn't mention it to her.'

'Miss Sahib, it might throw some light upon our trouble! It might help us to find Taj –' Miss Bhose protested.

'Well, you speak to her then, privately, when you get a chance about it. But we mustn't all of us – seem to pry.'

The low-caste teacher said –

'In my opinion, she knows a great deal more than she lets on. She says she has forgotten where she was born. She said it was a long way away, didn't she, down south. She knows this district. I said that my mother came in from Tiliampur, and she said, "Tiliampur on the river?" like that! So maybe, she really does know, Miss Sahib. She's so stupid she gives herself away.'

'Secrets are heavy burdens, I've noticed,' Davida remarked. 'May we all walk lightly!'

For three nights, going to bed pillowless, Davida thought of Begum. The fourth day, returning from a more distant village, she stopped to see how she was

getting on, late in the afternoon when the lovely blue smoke from the evening's cooking was hanging over the village. Opening the courtyard door, she saw through the gathering darkness a yellow flickering in the veranda fireplace. Begum was better, then — able to cook supper. Her little girls rushed towards Davida and brought her to their mother, who had arisen from her stool to give it to the Miss. It was less than a foot high, that little tape-strung stool, and the fireplace was even more lowly. That was simply three clay sides of a little gleaming quadrangle on the floor and on it lay a saucer-shaped iron griddle.

Begum stooped and lifted a baked pancake of unleavened whole-wheat bread from it and slapped another into its place. Her face seemed to have resumed its normal symmetry. She had been blowing the fire, and her eyes were bleary with tears from it, and her veil she had thrown back into a scarf about her neck, so that it might not hinder her in her cooking. She had on an extravagant red garment like a long loose shirt and calico trouser-like things. She reached for an old stool for herself, and sitting down, bent over and took a bit of dough from the hand-made brass dough-pan on the floor at her side. And as she went on talking to Davida, she patted the dough back and forth from one hand to the other with the gesture Western mothers use to teach the baby 'Patticake, patticake, Baker's man.' And the dough got cleverly thinner and thinner, rounder and rounder, more and more even. And when it was scarcely thicker than paper, and a foot in diameter,

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

balancing it on one palm, with the other hand she reached over and seized the cake on the griddle which was perfectly cooked by this time, and with one gesture tossed it to its fellows in the basket on the floor at her side, and the same moment slapped the new marvel on to the griddle. The conversation was conventional.

'Stay for supper. There is something very good in the pot.' The pot's contents had been cooked on this same fireplace and removed before the bread had been begun. It was too full of red peppers to need fire to keep it hot. 'You must taste what I've cooked.'

'Thank you. I'd better not. Not this time. I'm having company at home for dinner. The Sahibs are coming. I must eat with my guests.'

'But it won't hurt you to eat just a little here. Do spice up our supper by tasting it.'

'I think I won't to-day, thank you.'

'But the turnips are delicious just now. I'll give you just a little. Oh! Bah!' Davida had noticed that the usual gestures were accompanied this evening by some hasty little insistent jerkiness of the fingers, and many rubbings and wipings of them against one another. 'Perhaps you'd better not, then. The bread — goodness knows what may be in it to-night.'

'What's the matter? I'm sure it's good bread.'

'It's those medicinal feathers, Miss Sahib. Those feathers are a sort of inconvenience that you gave me. Lah! Here, take this off my hand. It'll get into the bread again!'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'What feathers? Is your ear well again? You have had no fever to-day?'

'Oh, I'm all right now! Bobby, stand up! Show the Miss Sahib your new shirt. Look, Miss Sahib, I made them to-day! Go and get your trousers, son. What do you sit about without your covering for, before ladies? Are you without shame? Isn't that a sweet little shirt, Miss Sahib?'

'It is indeed,' Davida said. It was by far the whitest garment in the firelight—a perfectly new piece of cotton material, apparently.

Bobby—his mother considered this smart foreign name more elegant really than his own name, Glamour-from-Paradise—Bobby ducked hurriedly into the room and ran back to Davida, carrying the essential trousers. Balancing himself with a hand on her shoulder—he was but four—he began putting them on. His mother reached over, between cakes, and tied them for him, underneath his new shirt, pyjama-wise. White and blue striped stuff they were. Davida reached out to feel it, for it had, some way, a familiar look.

'What's this cloth?' she asked.

'That's the foreign pillow you gave me. I just dumped the little feathers out, and look, Miss Sahib, what strong little trousers they are! I split it down the middle and sewed it up for his legs. The shirt is that outer part—the covering, of course. The sleeves are too short. But it couldn't be helped. It was the best I could do, with the cloth. It was a gift from God, Miss Sahib. The virtue of those bird

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

feathers cured my pain and the strength of the cloth just made me well, when I examined it. I did need it so! I started right in sewing it up, and I forgot all about my ear. He tore the new shirt I had got for him for the winter right down the middle of it, the first day he played in it. But feel these trousers. It'll be some days before he wears that stuff out!

She lifted the very white pillow-case shirt up over the protruding little brown stomach. The outraged Anglo-Saxon pillow ticking, not accustomed to covering oriental nakedness, stood out stiffly and fully to just below the little bare knees. Davida looked. She looked about the courtyard. 'Those feathers,' she commented, 'had some value in themselves.'

'Yes. They had. The children liked them. You never saw such an affair of shrieking and laughing as when I let them loose. The baby was scared out of his wits. They did look like little spirits – the way they moved about. They flew out into the street, and all the children in the ward ran about chasing them. A boy said it was like snow in the geography book. Bobby's father was annoyed to have them in the bread. But I reminded him that the wind would soon blow them away, and the trousers would last. They're almost gone now.'

'But look here, Begum. I brought you that pillow for your ear. Because you said the hard pillow hurt it so. And you know very well you'll have a bad ear again before long, and you won't have anything comfortable to lie down on.'

Begum sighed.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'The pain is indeed very stern while it lasts. That's true.' She spoke ruefully. But instantly her face brightened. And she appealed assuredly to Davida as one reasonable woman to another.

'But after all, Miss Sahib, it is only my *ear* that aches sometimes, you know. And it was his whole little body that was always shivering with cold. And see how nice and warm he looks now.' And she pulled the child down into her lap and kissed him and lifted another browned cake from its cooking.

Davida drove home meditating, with a smile on her face. Every day brought a new proof of her folly, and yet no day ever quite succeeded in convincing her of it. Thinking of Bobby, she chuckled. She wished she could have told her man about him. He would have stretched out his hand and 'Good morning, little brother-trousers,' he would have laughed. John Ramsey would smile, if she told him, kindly enough. But she wouldn't tell him, for in his heart he would not approve of the gift. She didn't care. Jesus probably thought they were just dear little garments. 'I was naked, and ye clothed me in your pillow case,' Jesus would say. He wouldn't add 'accidentally.'

CHAPTER III

Getting home, Davida dressed for an evening of what she called diversion, an American interlude. She put on a curative, nationalizing little frock which she had got at home the year before, which she saved frugally from contact with reeking beds so that it would serve for English-speaking dinners till she went home on her next furlough in six years' time. And she took out, as it were, her American tongue. It was a rest to fall back into one's own language, even though not one of the three Americans at the table would be able to finish a sentence without squeezing some word of Indian slang into it. Having two men to dinner constituted for Davida an event. When there were only the two of them in the Station, John Ramsey scrupulously refused all Davida's invitations. But when either of them had a guest, they lunched or dined together.

Davida arranged the red chrysanthemums. She poked the fire. She even tried to instigate the kerosene lamp's opaque white shade to gaiety. She sighed, and pulled the rocking-chairs into the fire's glow. And then she sat down to wait for the men. She took it for granted they would be late.

After a little she heard them coming up on to the veranda — at least, she heard one of them. The old Doctor came in. They shook hands with undisguised sincere affection. He was out of patience. He stroked his long grey beard, and he blinked his mild grey eyes.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'A nice Sahib this is of yours! What's become of him anyway? I've lost the whole afternoon, and I'll miss my train, and the singer is sitting in your cook-house grumbling at being kept. We'll have to start to work after dinner, now!'

The Doctor had come to hear a professional wedding singer, whom Ramsey had got hold of, howl out an elusive air which the two men intended capturing for purposes of worship if indeed the bars and stops of Western music script could cage its wavering quavering quarter notes.

'That's too bad of him! Of course he always keeps me waiting. But I'm sure he wouldn't have kept you — for anything. Something extraordinary must have detained him.'

'Well, I won't get home till midnight, now. He might have telegraphed me, I should think.'

Davida didn't like hearing John Ramsey criticized. She loved him loyally, unusually, exceedingly. The curious high comradeship which existed between the two of them was certainly not Platonic. It lacks its English adjective for the reason that it could have found its life and grown to maturity only in an un-English spot, in an unworldly world, in circumstances as exotic and lovely as the name of Aiyanianwala. Those circumstances were as rare as the old missionary who had been creating them moment by moment for forty years. Even when John Ramsey had arrived in the Station, Miss Monroe had been carrying on for many years. She had by that time earned her title. She was the First

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

Lady. She was a pukkha ferishta, words pronounced impressively to mean an absolutely first-class angel. In one sense, it may be, Miss Monroe is not actually in this story, being at the time in the United States. But in the glare and unreality of the Punjab, in the exile and loneliness of India, it is difficult to say at times definitely who is physically present. And many of the achievements of the white skinned are wrought beneath the eyes of those actually very far away. Not purposely. Not willingly. It is the counsel of necessity and the device of despair. When you ask for bread and get a stone, you learn to suck nourishment. The full and fortunate may laugh at so pretentious a gluttony. But the fact remains that really Miss Monroe is always in this story. So is Davida's lover. So is John Ramsey's wife. Their absence is the setting of its stage.

All those pioneer years Miss Monroe had gone about for Jesus' sake, a slight, frail, incorrigibly prim and genteel lady, repeatedly and voluminously skirted and underskirted to the ground in spite of all temperatures, collared to the chin, always gloved to the finger-tips, shaded by an enormous khaki-coloured pith hat, from underneath which her face gleamed out, slight, illumined, fanatically perhaps, by its zeal, softened by its mild direct grey eyes, and by a very large and beautifully tender mouth. When every high-caste house in the city had been instantly shut against her because she had dared to go and visit in outcaste quarters, she had gone to her

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

bungalow and then back to her school deserted by its indignant pupils. She had cried to her distant high-caste friends that she had cleansed herself. She had bathed a great bath. She had prayed to God to wash away any defilement from her heart which she might have received from pariahs – to whom she intended to return constantly – and God had spoken to her and pronounced her fit for any society. And when they had looked steadily at her face they had had to believe her. They had tried often not to believe her, but week by week – season by season, she had convinced them. When Davida had arrived to be her young and assistant angel, she had naturally shared to some extent the reverence which the community had for the First Lady.

Now that reverence depended not so much upon those years of overflowing kindness, as upon her reputation for that high and awful attribute – chastity. Western readers must here consider the neglected fact that only civilizations which had been able some way to exact a high standard of celibate morality from their women, joke about their accomplishment. The less chastity there is in any society, the higher seems its value to both sexes. The more comfortable men are about their mothers', their wives' and their sisters' abundant supply of it, the more they enjoy other women's convenient lack of it. Worship of virginity has, perhaps, grown up generally in societies prepared for it by satiety and corruption. India, fatally oversexed, burned to death ages ago emotionally by a lust unrestrained by

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

religion and encouraged by climate – India lacks no element of readiness to worship virginity.

Accordingly Davida had been forced from her first year there to realize unhappily that in a country where men pursue beautiful, shining, clean silver dollars, life is more invigorating, more diverting, more free and delightful to women than one in which men pursue desire. The preoccupations of her environment she found almost intolerably tiresome. She knew from experience that nothing annoys an ordinary unmarried Anglo-Saxon woman as much as being continually called a Holy Virgin – except, perhaps, its antithesis. The degree of your virginity, said Davida, is something decent people don't speculate about aloud. But here – in this place!

For whenever you went to a new village, or to a new group of women in the city, whatever woman happened to be your sponsor would introduce you proudly, 'The Miss Sahib. A Virgin!' And if anybody cracked more than a little incredulous smile over this preposterous joke, up went some one's hand in warning. 'Hist! Be careful! She *is* a virgin!' And the smile would disappear. God forbid, say the superstitious, that we should even accidentally blaspheme any of His attributes. This country, Davida used to groan, in the days of her initiation, is a filthy sink of a country – a stinking sewer of life, and nothing else. No wonder Englishmen never let their wives learn this language. This is a rotten, loathsome, dirty nation.

She poured out these complaints to Miss Monroe –

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

who answered, 'What do these things matter to us, Davida? We are not living in India. We are living in the heavenly places of Christ Jesus, you know.'

That was all very well for Miss Monroe, Davida would say to herself—that was all very well for Miss Monroe. *She* hadn't a linguistic mind. Her thoughts were so secure in heaven that she didn't hear more than half of what was said about her, and didn't understand more than half she heard. But Davida had ears for declensions and inflexions, ears intent upon remembering exactly how verbs vary and interchange every ten miles of her district. Her thoughts, alas, were upon racy idioms and diverting figures of speech. She had been with Miss Monroe only a year when she took occasion to reprove a woman who in the midst of the First Lady's fervent and unsuspecting prayer, let forth a blast of obscenity. At once she had heard the reprovéd one, in surprise, trying to justify her conduct to her neighbour.

'The First Lady wouldn't understand a thing like that!' she asserted, grieved.

'No. But this new one does. She understands even gestures.'

The first one looked at Davida thoughtfully.

'Yes. I suppose she does. She looks as if she would.'

Davida resented that remark in an unchristian manner, even during prayer. Why had she to be handicapped so by appearance? Why had she a jolly sort of tilted nose, instead of a thin, high-bred one

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

like Miss Munroe's? Why were her eyes not prim? Their lashes were too long, and they just would twinkle, so many amusing things always confronted them. They had once in her younger days been called even devilish, but she had never for a minute believed they deserved that. She knew, however, that she had a shrewd sort of look, which impressed itself upon Indians. They didn't try for very long to deceive her by the obvious tricks. The First Lady they had fooled and deceived and lied to for forty years.

Yet the First Lady had the advantage even there. For Davida sometimes wondered if any Indian had ever deceived that saint without feeling himself a contemptible sneak. She used even to wonder if the First Lady didn't sometimes allow herself to be deceived just to convince deceivers of their baseness. She scarcely pretended to understand Indians or their idiom. She only loved them. And love is a force before which they are utterly defenceless. And the power she had over a whole community of Christian Indians was incalculable. There was a multitude whom she had seized upon when they were little naked filthy babies, and washed, and put into school, and cajoled and teased and spanked and threatened and inspired into self-respect. 'There are a thousand men in our district,' one of them assured Davida once, 'who if the First Lady would snap her finger at them and say "Go die!" would go straightway and die.'

But Davida had as yet no such security. She was

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

still young, she looked younger than she was, and she was full of vitality. Prayer hadn't thinned her nose. Fasting wouldn't have shortened her eyelashes. The non-Christian community conjectured about her cynically still. Here she was now, living alone since the First Lady's departure, and in the next bungalow a white man was living alone who kept his wife in a foreign land, for the sake of his children's education — he said. Davida was never allowed to forget her unmarried position. Whenever she would take her departure from a Moslem house in the city, some mighty mother-in-law was sure to rise up and send her away with prayer. 'God be a thick veil,' she would pray. 'God shield thee from all men's eyes.' Whereupon Davida would smother her desire to tilt her inconvenient nose a bit more and say flippantly, 'They haven't hurt me yet, mother!' Or she would call at some home trying to ward off marriage from a small eager pupil at Miss Bhose's school. She knew it was humbug, pure and simple, self-justifying and disgusting humbug — this talk about Indian girls developing earlier than other girls. She knew that her cooped-up, veiled, enervated little pupils were less ready physically for motherhood at thirteen than the average little out-of-door hockey-playing tom-boy of an English or American thirteen-year-old. Emotionally to be sure they were more ready, since the ultimate functioning of their bodies had been kept in their minds every minute of their life from infancy upwards. Davida had occasion to say nearly every day to at least one mother, 'Don't take her out

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

of school just yet! Let her stay a year or two longer.' Every day she got the same reproachful answer: 'Shall we let her go unmarried and be ruined? How can we protect her from the world? Tell me now, is it true that in foreign countries little girls are left unmarried without being ruined?'

Then Davida would have to recall and describe her co-educational childhood. Inspired by disgust, she would exaggerate perhaps its beauties, since women usually in the absence of the Ten Commandments get to loving them too much. 'We went to school with boys. Our faces were unveiled, quite bare. Our heads were bare. Our arms were bare. Our necks were bare. Sometimes our feet were bare. If by accident we had appeared naked before them, convention would have expected them to turn their backs till we had passed. We sat in classes with men. We played games with men. We sung with men. We danced with men. We didn't always behave well. The men didn't always behave well. But the point was, we were *all expected* to behave well in those circumstances. Our conventions were based upon the supposition that some males can look upon the face of some females without lusting after them. But here,' she would add sometimes, 'all society is regulated by the supposition that no man can look upon any woman without lusting after her, not even his daughter-in-law.' How high has a man risen above beastliness when he can honestly say there is one woman in the world after whom he doesn't hanker, she often reflected. The bareness of our

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

bodies in those scant clothes we wore, was the great tribute of admiration we paid our menfolk for having got free enough from the tyranny of their bodies, to think of something else. Small wonder that John Ramsey had become to her a symbol of a life freer than the one about her. 'How I do love a man like that' – she thought almost hourly.

For she had continually to depend on that sheer chivalry of his which their environment nourished if it had not indeed created. When she had begun going to villages first with Miss Monroe there were some to which the First Lady said it wasn't convenient to go without the Sahib. She would never acknowledge that it wasn't safe. She said that when the Sahib was with them, the curious males naturally gathered round him, and left her in peace with the women. Some few of the women of each village would be acquainted with the First Lady. But more would be startled and curious. 'These two are then the wives of that Sahib?' 'Yes,' some one would explain. 'This young one is his new one.'

'I am not the Sahib's wife!' Davida would answer distinctly. 'Christian gentlemen have but one wife. In our country they are put in jail for marrying a second!' 'How truly diverting!' A great laugh always over this. 'You aren't married to him, then? Have you any children?' She found presently the expression to use to call them sharply to a halt. 'I am – we both are – the Sahib's sisters before God!' she would announce, solemnly. Then some one was sure to arrive with the astounding explanation of

these white females. '*Virgins* they are!' Whereupon the group of women would gather about gratified, eager. 'Here is our chance, now,' they seemed to say. 'We'll maybe never see such a creature again! Let's take a good look at them. That is why the younger one doesn't wear ear-rings, of course, a woman of God. Where is the Sahib's wife?' 'At home with the baby,' Davida would explain. 'She must be very beautiful to trust him with you.' 'I tell you our relationship is before God. It is to God she trusts him,' Davida would repeat, using an idiom whose powers she was never able quite to fathom. It seemed like a halo about her, in their minds, that Punjabi phrase.

And John Ramsey, when they were ready to leave, would be waiting to see them out of the village, standing humbly at one side to let them precede him, as if they were queens, and exacting from all the surprised village the most exaggerated respect for them. The villagers would recall the Great Queen — Victoria — how she had decreed that for her sake every white man must take his hat off his head when he meets a white woman. And they would let their lively imaginations go on playing with a fact discussed in even the remotest village, how when the great old Queen's grandson, the Prince of Wales, was in Delhi, the fear of his grandmother, the dead Queen, induced him to let his white Princess walk before him and unveiled into the white man's church. The idea of the Princess stalking majestically ahead of her lord into worship, with him following meekly

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

behind, was one out of which these simple women got a wonderful amount of satisfaction. They conjectured that it was the fear of the same queen that induced John Ramsey to stand aside while the English Virgins passed. 'It's not the queen exactly,' Davida would try to explain. 'It's the queen and her prophet Jesus – upon whom, be peace.'

And then, to herself:

'Lord, Lord, how I do love a man like John Ramsey. What a jewel he is, what a masterpiecel! My eagle's feather! I can forget the rest!' She luxuriated in the certainty that he wasn't going to begin making eyes at her. He had no more idea of flirting with her than he had of becoming Caliph of Mecca. 'He thinks of me,' she would gloat, 'as a necessary evil, a cross to bear – a part of his hardship. He tolerates me through gritted teeth.' He did everything he ever could to get the Mission to send me to another Station till Miss Monroe returns. He stood up and said in mission meeting that he didn't want me living here alone. But now that it's his assigned duty to look after me, he will do it faithfully and with prayer if it bores him to death. How I do love that sweet old dear. He's the nicest thing that Christianity and the American frontier ever produced!'

Of course he wouldn't have kept that venerable old doctor out of bed till midnight a cold night like this – why – not for anything! She couldn't think of any excuse that would justify such thoughtlessness.

'Well, I won't keep you waiting for dinner. Not

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

for a moment. We'll have ours, and he can have something warmed up, if he doesn't come. But surely he'll be here in a minute.'

Afterwards they adjourned to the fire in the living-room, and there Davida poured the tea she had had made especially for the doctor. She knew how he liked it, so strong it was almost solid. She knew the good-natured contempt he had for the younger generation of missionaries. They might be phonetically trained, but half of them drank hot water and milk at tea-time, and coffee after dinner. He grumbled from time to time about Ramsey, and sang later the captured air. Of course if Ramsey wasn't so stubborn he would not have waited. He was perfectly capable of writing that song down. But Ramsey likely wouldn't agree with him. It went this way, Ta-da-da-da — up towards Pindi. But at Lala Musa it was sung thus. So he went on. Davida wasn't bored. She sat thinking how good it is, if you must be old, to have done something. The serene old soul would go to his grave confident that a few millions of low caste would never again, likely, be so unhappy as they had been before his ministrations. And she noticed how old he was getting. Failing, the old thing was. It was unpardonable of Ramsey to keep him up until midnight, so cold a night. And he remarked presently that it was very foolish of Ramsey to be knocking about in villages so late at night.

Davida, listening every minute for his step, tried to think of excuses for him. He never stayed in

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

villages over-night. He wasn't the sort to sleep in a village bed.

'Perhaps his horse has run away,' she suggested, grinning at the absurdity of his horse moving fast. He couldn't have lost his way. He's out some place with Jalal, the pastor of our Flowery Basti. Perhaps a bridge over the canal is closed – or there is a break in the bank – or – something. If I stayed out till this time of night in a village he'd raise Cain.'

'I should think he would!' retorted the doctor. 'But I won't keep you up longer,' he said finally. 'I'll go over to the other bungalow and wait till train time.'

But there would be no fire lit in Ramsey's bungalow, and Davida wouldn't hear of the doctor taking chances of getting cold. She sat and talked to him till after eleven, and then sent him to the station in her trap. Why, the poor old thing, how laboriously he climbed up into it. It was outrageous of Ramsey to have disappointed him. She was disgusted with her brother. Still, there wouldn't be any supper ready for him when he got home. So she prepared a tray for the night-watchman to take over to him – some of the favourite pudding which she had made for him according to his wife's recipe, some cold chicken, and a cup of soup to be warmed up.

And then she went to bed, pillowless, and somewhat rueful.

She learned before she was dressed the next morning that John Ramsey's Indian clerk was asking

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

to see her. She found him waiting excitedly on the veranda.

‘Miss Sahib, Salaam!’ he began. ‘What thing is this now? The Sahib has not come back. Not the whole night. Not this morning. And here the pay-day has dawned upon me unprepared. Dinner for fifty to be ready. I have come for instructions.’

‘Well – I can’t instruct you. Of course he intended being back yesterday.’

‘Of course he did. His syce took no cooking vessels. He won’t have had a bite to eat since noon yesterday. The Sahib would have told him to take food if he hadn’t been coming back.’

Davida offered vague excuses. Eight miles, wasn’t it, some place beyond the Flowery Basti – where he had gone? Well, maybe – the bridge over the canal had given way – but of course in that case he would have driven to the next bridge. Maybe he had found some trouble among the Christians. Maybe . . .

But the clerk was insistent. The Sahib had not given him yet the cheque by which he was to bring from the bank money to pay the forty odd teachers who were even now beginning to assemble from outlying schools. Here, he said, was the pay-sheet. Would the Miss Sahib kindly give him the cheque?

The request annoyed Davida. Surely the man had known for years that she couldn’t sign the Sahib’s cheques. But she could say whether the preparations for the monthly dinner were to go on. The cook must set about his work immediately. It

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

was John Ramsey's habit, not altogether approved of by his peers, to invite to a good dinner every teacher who came to be paid. Davida backed him up always in the matter. A nice state of affairs if you couldn't invite your staff to a meal, once a month, when they were far away from their homes and in your very sitting-room, just for fear of making them 'rice Christians.' She gave the order for the dinner to be cooked. The Sahib, she insisted, would, of course, be home by ten.

It was the custom of Miss Monroe and Davida to be present at the conference which began in Ramsey's study at ten o'clock every pay-day. On a few rare occasions when he had been ill, Miss Monroe had herself led the devotions, and Davida had managed the business. When, therefore, she arrived that day to find herself the only missionary present, she took charge of the occasion without any hesitation. The circle of men sitting about the floor at her feet, and the three or four old honoured ones whose services entitled them to chairs were, as far as her sensibilities were concerned, white men, used to respecting Miss Sahibs. For most of them could scarcely remember when they hadn't come straight to the First Lady with all their sorrows and delights. Some of them the good Sahib allowed Davida partly to superintend and employ. In any of the villages where there was no little girls' school, if the teacher of the boys' school would teach little girls to read, Davida was always allowed to pay him for each one a very small bonus. It was her privilege, accordingly

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

- John Ramsey was such a good old lamb - to go about inspecting the boys' schools to examine their occasional girl pupils, whenever she wished. And if she by chance left orders contrary to the last which the Sahib had given, not one of those Indians doubted that it was the Miss Sahib's orders that were to be obeyed. They haven't an idea how he hauls me over the coals privately for what he submits to publicly, Davida often reflected.

They began, therefore, their meeting. They had prayer, and they sang, and sang again, and went on to try the new airs the Sahib was experimenting with, their eyes most of the time down the road towards the place where, Davida assured them, the Sahib would be appearing presently. When then they caught sight of his old bamboo cart turning into the drive-way from the road, they rose like a flock of birds, and went out to meet him. As he came towards them, their expressions changed quickly, from pleasure to surprise, from surprise to consternation. He was turning away from the drive to the front veranda, where habitually he alighted. With one accord, Davida and the men cut across the bit of lawn to the back drive, and to his obvious annoyance gathered excitedly about him.

For he was a sight. They had seen as he entered the gate that his sun-hat was broken and held together by its khaki covering. Its angular pieces sat drunkenly over one eye, and the other eye had disappeared beneath a red and blue bruise. His overcoat was torn and its collar turned up to hide

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

the lack of a white collar beneath. One side of his face was darkened, not by unshaved beard but by — what was this? — a great dirty bruise! They were all questioning him with great sighs of pity and commiseration — and he, alighting — he was trying to carry it off easily.

‘I suppose I look untidy. Sorry to be so late.’

Untidy!

‘You’re hurt,’ cried Davida.

‘I’m not *hurt*! Not *hurt*, really. I had a fall. I had an — accident. It isn’t anything!’ His normal eye was appealing to Davida to protect him from question. ‘I’ll wash up and be with you in a minute,’ he said.

But if he supposed for a minute he could carry it off that way — he couldn’t realize what a shock his appearance was to them! The idea of that little, placid, kindly, delicate-featured, fair-skinned Sahib, always neat, always brushed, suddenly returning from a mysterious night-out looking like a — like a bemaused pugilist! The crowd of men, their smiles faded, turned to look at one another in amazement. The Sahib was sending his trap away. He was making resolutely across the veranda for his bedroom. Davida was so alarmed she cried to him.

‘But look here! Let me see your face! Let me wash that for you! It must be bound up!’

‘Tut, tut! It’s nothing. I’ll put some vaseline on it. I haven’t time. These men won’t get back till after dark, as it is, now.’ And he went into his bedroom, shutting the door decidedly against the

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

more authoritative of the men who were offering to dress his injuries.

What could she do? It was just like the Sahib. If his wife had been there, she would have brought him to time. But he was a good deal of an old mandarin, after all, and he wouldn't allay their curiosity. They turned round-eyed upon one another. Some of them came in anxiously from the veranda. They had failed even to get an explanation from the syce. He, it seemed, was in a hungry ill-temper, and although he was only a low-caste Hindu, he could well afford to despise these Christians' lower birth. They would get nothing from him.

Usually the business of the day was well over by the time dinner was served to the rows on the veranda. Davida, who had stayed to discuss her schools with the men, was perplexed to see how foolishly the Sahib, instead of explaining at once what had happened — as if anyone could think of anything else! — went on avoiding their very natural questions. After all it wasn't every day these Indians saw their manager returning with a black eye from a night that couldn't be explained simply. 'He can't think he can hush things up this way,' she thought. 'There's been some frightful row, or he wouldn't try. And it'll all come out.' And finally, cornered, he had had to say to her —

'Oh, you'll hear about it all some day. I gave my word of honour it wouldn't be through me.' And he laughed, trying to pretend it was a joke.

That wasn't satisfying her. She knew him too

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

well. He had been through some tremendous experience. He was stunned by it. He was still thinking of it, all the time, while he attended to business. Likely after the day's work was over, he would come and tell her all about it. The men were saying to one another, 'Somebody has beaten him.' But who had ever heard of a Sahib being beaten!

He did come to see her that evening. She studied him closely. He was partly shaved and neatly clothed. He looked extremely tired and haggard, and older than she had ever seen him. She had never noticed before how grey his thin ruddy hair was getting. He drew himself shivering towards the fire as soon as he came in.

'You've got fever,' she accused him.

'Not more than a hundred,' he replied, not liking her remark. No use trying to get him to take his temperature, she knew. He was hardened to malaria.

'You ought to go home and go to bed,' she said, knowing that he never went to bed for fever as long as he could stand up. But he said startingly –

'Yes. I think I will. I've caught cold.'

'Have you had that wound properly dressed?'

'I haven't a wound! It's a little bruise,' he retorted almost sharply, though he was a man whose voice was controlled to the last inflexion. 'I cleaned it all up myself!'

'You ought to go down to the doctor. Or call him here.'

'Nonsense! I'll be a lion refreshed, after a night's sleep.'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

He wanted to sit talking to her of other things. If he wasn't going to tell her what she really wanted to know, he had better be in bed. She told him so. He agreed and went away.

Now Davida had often assured herself, smugly, perhaps, that she was not a curious woman. She hated the idea, even, of prying into what didn't concern her. But this was a bit too much of a good thing. Besides she wasn't sure that it didn't concern her. Wasn't John Ramsey more truly her brother than those distant sons of her father and mother who lived in that place called the United States? Hadn't his wife, that little black-eyed Emma Ramsey, besought her, as she departed, to look after her John, left as he would be with no one to care for him, surrounded with malaria, plague, sunstroke, cholera, cobras and native cooks. Davida had been practically a member of his family for years, with a place of her own at his table like any other child, as long as Emma had been in the Station. Wasn't she even then daily eating very good bread that Emma Ramsey had taught a cook to make?

There had never been anything uncertain about that clear-headed Emma Ramsey. There might be some doubt in her mind as to whether her husband was called to preach the Gospel, but there was no doubt about the fact that she was called to make him comfortable while he did it, and to bring up his children to be as like him as possible. Davida's food was cooked in a cook-house some way from the dining-room door, a place so untidy that she seldom

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

looked into it. But John Ramsey's food was cooked, when his wife was in the Station, under her eye, in a shining clean kitchen which she had had built adjoining the dining-room. She wouldn't have him eating bread from the bazaar where she said that it got so soiled being kneaded that it was whited later with white lead. She ordered a bread mixer from Montgomery Ward's, and watched the delicious brown stuff which agreed with her John, being prepared in it. When her babies, upon her return from furlough, refused to drink boiled milk, the only kind that ever was drunk in India, she bought a cow, and disinfected it, and she disinfected a house for it. She had intended milking it herself, but it would allow no white woman to approach it. So she got a man, and disinfected him. She made a white gown for him to wear at the milking, and she saw to it that it was washed. And morning and night she brought forth a clean bowl, and watched the man wash his hands in it. She allowed nothing to interfere with this ritual. The disinfecting was her religious duty. The going forth with the children to watch the cow milked was her social life. She gave herself up to it, and saw her children grow strong and hearty, the size of three Indian children of their age. And that was her reward. When her first son had been two years old, she had dismissed, for good reason, her Indian ayah, and after that she never trusted one of her four children, boy or girl, alone with an Indian servant. They were too precious to be soiled by their shabby environment.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

Their birthright was an uncorrupted childhood. So she became their environment. If she had to go shopping, she left them with Davida. Literally every minute of their life until they were old enough to go to school, they were with her night and day. And when she was ill, when she was called away by death or an illness, Davida took them in charge. And that was why she might safely take liberties sometimes with John Ramsey. The love she bore his children made him forgive her many things.

Yet she wouldn't ask him again where he had got his black eye. He had snubbed her once, and that was enough. It was nothing less than a snub, his making a secret of what had happened. Because hadn't he always insisted that what was the burden of one, was the burden of all? Hadn't he always urged Miss Monroe and Davida to share with him all their perplexities and annoyances? However base curiosity might be, she couldn't help wondering what the truth of the matter was. It was either something serious, and in that case she owed it to Emma to know what it was and to help him, or it wasn't serious, and in that case she would smile maliciously. John Ramsey didn't believe in secrets. You ought not to get into scrapes you can't tell the truth about, he had said a hundred times. Now wouldn't it be too funny if he had to tell a bit of a lie for once!

For two days he had fever. She sent her cook to inquire about him with soups and suitable puddings. The third day he came to see her. Yellow he was, and haggard, patched up with court plaster over the

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

more gaudy bits of his face, both eyes open. He said he couldn't go into the city looking that way. He was doing some work at home. He made jests about his condition, but no offer of explaining it. She said to herself, 'Oh, very well, Sahib. I'll find out, sooner or later. Whoever kept anything secret in India!'

A week later one morning she found Begum waiting for her in the sun on the veranda. She had walked the miles in from the Flowery Basti, and she had scarcely patience for the essential greetings.

'Miss Sahib,' she started in, 'I want to know what is the matter with the Father of Bobby.' By that honourable name she addressed her lord, and spoke of him. 'He isn't getting better. I'm going to get to the bottom of this.'

'Oh! Is the pastor ill? I'm sorry, I didn't know it!'

'You didn't know it!'

'I hadn't heard.'

'Do you mean the Sahib didn't tell you?'

'No.'

'That's very funny. Doesn't he tell you everything?'

'We always consult each other – you know – generally, about – important things.'

'This is an important thing. I'm going to find out what happened to them.'

'Why? What did happen to the pastor?'

'I don't know. He went one day to visit a village – walking – with the Sahib. And he never came home all the night. I was driven crazy with worry.'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

And the next morning the Sahib sends for the trap. They had left it at our village, because there was no road to that Pir Khanwala, where they had gone. He said the syce had to get it there somehow, road or no road. And he brings my husband back, all beaten. He had to hold him up, all the way, he was so ill, and he's been ill ever since. He isn't getting well. His ribs are all broken, I think.' She began to cry. 'And I can't find out what's happened. He won't tell me. I can't do anything for him. I was determined to come to you and find out. He's as thin as a match, and weak!'

'I'm sorry. But look here, Begum, he can't be so bad surely, or the Sahib would have had something done for him. Have you told the Sahib about this?'

'Have I told the Sahib! Has he told me, you'd better ask, Miss Sahib. He's been out to see him four times, and yesterday he brought the doctor from the Government Hospital. He says there's nothing broken inside him. He says it's only shock. And I can't find out what's happened!'

This was certainly strange. To think of John Ramsey going back and forth to see that pastor without so much as saying that the pastor was ill! Davida tried not to look surprised.

'Why do you try to find out what's happened? They don't want to tell, for some reason. Can't you trust them? They had — an accident, perhaps.'

'They were assaulted, that's what happened to them. If they don't want to tell, you may be sure

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

it's something we ought to know. They were almost killed. I can't even find out . . .'

'Begum, you must remember that the Sahib was with him. Is it likely that anyone would assault the Sahib?'

'Yes, it is. You don't know these people, this land. Violence, horror, under every smile, there is here! Why are they so mysterious about it? I've made inquiries. They left Patilpura about five, I've found out. And look here. They sent word by a messenger to the syce to bring the trap to Patilpura, and then they met it right out in the road, not near any village, and my husband was being carried on a bed because he couldn't even walk. I've found that out! Don't you suppose that everybody in the village is wondering who beat their pastor! You come with me and make the Sahib tell.'

She wasn't satisfied with any ethical considerations which Davida could put before her. It *was* her business to know what happened to the father of her children. He was so mild a man he never would defend himself, always turning the other cheek; he was a lamb for the slaughter. She had to take his part. She had been sending the Christians from village to village trying to discover the truth.

Davida had to refuse flatly several times over.

'You don't understand, Begum. I can't go to the Sahib and ask him what he chooses not to tell. It isn't our foreign way. You know he would do everything for the pastor that's possible. And I won't interfere. I just won't. Anyway we'll find it all out,

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

some day, as you know. A wife mustn't go prying about.'

'Not being married, you can say that. But I want to know *now*. It isn't good for my health to be kept guessing this way. And all those kidnappers and wicked people around.'

'What kidnappers?'

'Well, they say there *are* kidnappers.'

'They say everything. They wouldn't be kidnapping men, missionaries, would they?'

'You can't tell. They might.'

Davida laughed at her, and sent her away at length with some good tea for the pastor's illness.

But the secrecy rankled. She refrained nobly from even mentioning the mystery to Ramsey openly. When she got a chance she gave him a little dig, now and then.

'Have you heard what's happened to your garden in the Flowery Basti?' he asked her one evening presently.

'No. What? You go there more often than I, nowadays.'

He seemed to see no reference to the mystery in the remark. He smiled at her, curiously.

'Well, I'd like to know the truth of that matter, if you don't mind telling me. What . . .'

'Oh, I don't mind telling you. I haven't anything to hide.'

He went on, simply. 'What exactly did you tell those people about that plant, that poinsettia?'

'I don't know. I can't remember exactly.' She

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

knew he wouldn't have approved of any such – well, evasions and implications as those which she had indulged in there. 'Why? What's the trouble?'

'Of course – they have misunderstood. They've exaggerated, of course. I knew at once you hadn't said it would fly away if they had a row.'

'I never said that! What happened?'

'They've had a great fight again, the women. That was on Thursday. And on Friday, when I went out, they were all stirred up about it. For early that morning, as soon as anybody got up, they found out that the whole plant was missing, pot and all. Now, what do you know about that?'

'Well – why – I – I don't know *anything* about it! Do you suppose I arranged it?'

'They said you had told them it was a lover of peace. I recognized your style there – not – well, literal, you understand. They said you said it might not prosper if they quarrelled and fought, but they didn't expect it to desert them, stem and pot and all.'

'Somebody's played a trick. The pastor will know.'

'He says he doesn't. I believe him. He wouldn't do a thing like that. He wouldn't impose upon their superstition.'

'He does seem rather given to mysteries of late, don't you think?' she asked innocently. What was he accusing her of, anyway? She couldn't help laughing at the absurdity of his implications.

'I didn't know this was going to happen. I didn't suppose they would get into a fight so soon again. It's

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

only a coincidence — a rather pretty one, if you ask me. You can't defend yourself from coincidence, you know,' she said.

'No,' he replied. He sighed deeply. She knew what he was remembering. She had been with him in a village church one day not long before, and had noticed that several of the Christian children were wearing amulets against snake-bites. These things were Moslem. Besides they cost money better spent on food. 'If you are Christian now,' he had said to them, 'take those silly things off your children's arms.' They had hesitated. But one of their leaders had risen, and calling his twelve-year-old and only son to him, had broken the string that bound the amulet to his arm. 'I'm not afraid. I trust in God to protect this child.' The others had followed suit. And the next day that boy had died of cobra-bite. Who could guard against coincidence, indeed, among the superstitious? No wonder John Ramsey sighed.

'The pastor was good about it, I thought. He told the people that whether the plant was a sign from God of His displeasure or not, they had disgraced themselves by breaking His peace. And he called off the Christmas festivities. He said they ought rather to pray and fast, because they were the laughing-stock of all their neighbours, fighting like cats and dogs, and pretending to be men of peace.'

'Well, don't blame *me* for this. It isn't my fault! We'll find out soon enough what happened. It all comes out, doesn't it?' she asked sweetly. 'It's too

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

bad for the village to have no Christmas celebration. We're going to have an unusually grand one in the city school. We have to, to bring our stock up to par. I suppose you haven't done anything about the teacher — about Taj? It's a blow to us, all this scandal, this speculation. It'll half break us up.'

But John Ramsey said:

'Honestly now, have you lost a single pupil through it? Miss Bhose has simply got a bee in her bonnet. And how can you expect me to do anything when you haven't a sign or proof of any kidnapping? You mark my word, she'll be turning up — married, I hope.'

He took his departure. Davida looked after him grumbling. A nice one John Ramsey was, to be preaching to her! Beginning all his sentences 'Honestly, now!' as if he doubted the truth of her statements! He had a whole swarm of bees in his bonnet! There were times when she couldn't understand that man. The incontinence about her annoyed her extremely, but for that John Ramsey had a tolerance that was to her quite inexplicable. But just let anyone tell a tiny white fib, and off he flew on his hobbyhorse, preaching about telling the truth. And anyway, she hadn't exactly said anything untrue about the poinsettia. He was just absurd. She hoped that he had got into some little mess himself about which he would have to tell a whopper, for once, just to teach him a lesson.

'You are a set of liars,' he never missed a chance of saying, on the right occasion, to Christians or to

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

non-Christians. And those who heard him would answer indulgently, 'That's right. Give it us hot, Sahib. We are undoubtedly made so that it gives us indigestion to speak the truth.' 'Where in any other place in the world can you hire so many false witnesses whenever you want them publicly, openly to stand up and swear to anything you want them to, for eight cents a day?' he would challenge them. And they would grin and shrug and say, 'But we are poor folk, Sahib. Undoubtedly good perjurers earn more in other countries.' 'No!' he would retort, 'other places in the world there are some men whose word is better than an oath!' 'Like yourself, Sahib,' they would agree, serenely. 'It perhaps goes with a whiter skin.' Davida got tired of his old hobby. Not that she had any objection to the truth, in general. She often told it herself, when she was sure what it was.

CHAPTER IV

A little while before noon on Christmas Day Davida got into the bamboo cart and joggled along the wide dusty road into the city. The glare of that white way was so blinding that she could scarcely keep her eyes even part way open. She drove in through the old gate, down a wide crowded bazaar, and then a wide street. She left the cart at a lane too narrow for its entrance. The alley-like passage ran between the highly-walled unwindowed houses of the rich. She picked her way carefully down it, astride the open drain, undaunted by the fact that in front of every veiled doorway a revered household cow was blocking the street by standing entirely across it. She knew her neighbours, the cows, and gingerly patting their flanks coaxed them into a lengthwise attitude so she might slip past them. She came to the discreet doorway of Miss Bhose's School. And the sight she saw, entering, was as unlike a Western school as its bovine approach is unlike an asphalted boulevard.

Three hundred pampered little girls, the maximum attendance naturally, dressed gloriously for the occasion, glimmered and shone in the blinding, scorching sunlight, each of them in at least three colours different from the others. All the Hindus, and a few of the Moslems, who were not so rich, had on silken trousers, a long loose silk shirt, and over the shirts most of them had unbuttoned sleeveless little velvet waistcoats cut to make their girlish

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

slenderness more enchantingly slender. This was a grander occasion than even prize-giving days. Then they habitually wore veils dyed according to their rank in the school, the first form having a sheerness tinted perhaps peach pink above shining black hair, the second apple-green, the third turquoise-blue. To-day, without any uniformity, they were resplendent in hundreds of bespangled pinks, and shimmering blues and foaming greens and dazzling purples. Davida opened the door – they had been waiting for her – some in restless glimmering lines ready to march to some place, some sitting in squirming order on strips of sackcloth on the clay floor. They all jumped up – three hundred little hands went to foreheads salaaming, a thousand little holiday bracelets jingled, the swanky sandals scraped about, the teachers shrieked out instructions. The mothers gathered for the occasion – Hindus defended from pollution by billowy skirts of bordered silk, Moslems swaddled to the last degree of respectability in bales of fine cambrics gathered into capes which even inside the courtyard they clutched at – matrons weighed down with thick gold bracelets, all were adjusting their veils, spreading out their stiff silks and reminding the babies in their arms of the right manner of greeting a Miss.

Davida salaamed her way through the gleaming, shining, twinkling confusion across the courtyard to her office. At its door Miss Bhose came to her, severely unadorned by jewels, in her best black dress. There would be a moment of waiting before the

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

programme began, she said. There was always that moment of waiting, lengthening into hours. Would the Miss Sahib just wait, entertain the mothers, while Miss Bhose got the youngest infants marshalled into the hall.

The visitors crowded in about Davida. It was always in that whitewashed office that the East and the West met, as it were, and bowed to one another. Of this mutual forbearance, on the wall there hung a symbol. It was a time-table, into whose frame Miss Bhose slipped, term by term, a business-like large sheet of paper divided into well-labelled little squares. Davida in the beginning of their relationship, as the manager of that institution, had once consulted the compromise seriously. And then she had called Miss Bhose with some warmth of feeling.

‘What’s wrong with this time-table?’ she had asked. ‘I tried to find first the upper fourth form and then the third by it, and there isn’t one class sitting in the room assigned to it, as far as I can make out.’

‘I should have explained it to you,’ Miss Bhose had replied apologetically. ‘The Government Inspector insists on my having a time-table. Such a lady, she is! So well bred! I do admire that person! I wouldn’t disappoint her for worlds. She insists on the time-table. Very well. I always try to please her. She says no one in the province makes better time-tables than I do. But it is for *her*! *You* mustn’t consult it. If you want to know where the classes are, just ask me. I can tell, as a rule. In an old house

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

like this, it won't take long to find them, anyway. It often happens that my heart thinks it best to go on, after the time is up — to give a class weak in it, arithmetic all day for a while for instance. To follow a time-table would prevent such necessary adjustments of the inclinations. It isn't as if we had clever English children. What can you do with these lazy, marrying children, really?'

But she began this school the year I was born, Davida had reflected again, vowing obedience. And it was obedience she still gave the head mistress. When Miss Bhose announced that the girls were assembled in the hall, she shut the office door, and went with her following of mothers to take up the part Miss Bhose had assigned to her in the programme. The assembly hall, alas, had no windows at all — only three doors opening on to a veranda along the court. The few benches had been removed, and the children sitting on the floor packed tightly in were like an immense and tightly-tied bunch of red and gold and purple tulips. There was no platform, only a large table at one end of the room, where the mistresses sat, with the smaller pupils crouched about their feet, reserving a place for the visitors. Davida made her way through the murmuring expectant rainbow to the chair set apart for her. On the table lay the guest of honour, piled high in two stacks, the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

The children rose up, and began singing a hymn about Little Jesus. They all had mangers in their courtyards, those little girls — and they knew a

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

manger is no place for a nice baby. Then Davida got up and with those starry dark eyes watching her, began to read about the Child. And as she read, she wondered. Why do Indian women, even when they gather for a festival, intent upon eyeing each other's ear-rings, turn suddenly at these old words to sigh, to sigh greatly, wearily, always from the unfathomable depths of their hearts? Is it that burdened with a sense of the sinfulness of creation they dream always of a conception made in some way immaculate? Their faces changed under that story. Dreams came to their eyes. It seemed to belong to them – that tale – by right of their passionate maternity. A holy Virgin, an angel from heaven, a sweet little baby to nurse – is it not a delicious salvation? Davida shut the book, and sat down, and the whole gaudy room sighed.

Then Miss Bhose got up and made a speech. Words flowed like a flooding river over the listeners, carrying them away with her to something – to some place – where little babies and Heavenly Chastity and the Clarendon Press of Oxford were all mixed up into glory. Davida listening, said to herself that it was poetical oriental evangelical hyperbole. Miss Bhose motioned to a baby asleep at its mother's breast. She pointed to Davida, illustrating virginity. She lifted up a volume and found Aiyanianwala. 'Look. Is it not Aiyanianwala?' she passionately asked the Bengali B.A. mistress, as if to prove to her guests who didn't know English that she was not deceiving them. You would have thought from her

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

speech that the head mistresses of England had written that Encyclopædia. She praised those noble mothers who sent their daughters to school up to their maturity, so that they know the whole earth, so that sitting there in England they write histories of the feet that walked past this door of our school before the baby Jesus was born. Marriages, too, are good, made in heaven, and sons and daughters born of righteousness are not unworthy of us. (This statement was a concession to Davida, of course.) But we, we worthless natives, we marry off our young daughters in infancy, through the intrigues of barbers and priests not heavenly, so that women never learn, never get any further from ignorance, and on and on, until the poor guests turned their palms upwards in hopeless assent, and sighed aloud, murmuring, 'The lust which is in the world. Our daughters unmarried would be ruined!'

At this place in the programme, Miss Bhose's first speech ending, there was to have been a long Persian poem recited. Davida had protested as usual against this item, saying Persian poems were unintelligible to ninety-five per cent of the audience. But Miss Bhose had held as usual that that was the very reason for having them. 'It gives these women some idea of what they don't know,' she had argued. She, of course, had got her way. She called upon a girl from the sixth form who rose to recite the reproachful words.

Now Persian had been taught to the sixth form by the missing Taj, and her old mother, unobserved

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

by Davida, had been sitting sadly wedged in against a wall, on the edge of the crowd. Miss Bhose's speech and the sight of her daughter's pupil seemed together to have been too much for her. No longer could she hold her peace. But one line had come forth from the speaker, when suddenly – a wail, was it? began softly and rose with a sob to a shriek. Everybody turned towards it. Taj's mother had thrown back her veil and with gestures as if she was tearing out handfuls of hair, and lifting her arms towards heaven, she cried:

'Ai, Taj, my daughter! Ai, my daughter Taj!'

Davida shuddered.

Miss Bhose rose.

'Ai, crushed by violence! Ai, my flower despoiled!'

Another voice joined her. The baby sleeping on the breast of the mother nearest the noise, woke and began naturally crying with fear. 'That's the mother of the teacher who has got lost!' all the visiting mothers were explaining. 'Poor thing. Isn't it sad! What became of the girl?' 'Sh!' said Miss Bhose. The sixth form girls thought it their duty to express their sympathy. The wailing increased in volume.

'Sh!' cried Miss Bhose more commandingly. 'Silence! Girls, be still! Stop this disgraceful disorder. Stop this noise, I say. I was coming to that just now. Mother of Taj, be patient under sorrow. Sh! I say, my sisters and guests!'

'Ai, Baby Taj. Ai, my Bosom's load!'

'Ai, ai!'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

By this time the facile tears which etiquette had trained to flow were running down the faces of half the mothers, and the children were being as politely sniffing as they could. Miss Bhose ploughed her way through the mourners and laid hold of the mother's arm, not so firmly as her impulse urged her to, for decency required that she humour her.

'Sister,' she began. 'You hush! This is the children's hour. This is their little festival. I was about to express our sorrow, the school's loss, in this affliction. And will you hush now for a minute, while I speak to the mothers about this.'

Her pupils she could have managed. But their mothers had not been trained in their childhood to refrain from speaking. They all questioned aloud and explained louder and wailed more and more with voluminous sympathy, half sincere, half contemptuous. Miss Bhose raised her voice higher and higher. She had known when she began that she ought to make some official explanation. But she had so wanted to get in that bit about the Encyclopædia! And now she shrieked out, as loudly as she could, that the women weren't to listen to the enemies of girls' schools who had always prophesied that if a girl was allowed to learn to read, she would turn out badly. This could prove nothing. This would all be explained in good time. But no one was listening to her. By this time they were all crying to one another to hush. A pandemonium of mutual silencing broke loose. 'Don't you know enough to keep still'—everybody was yelling at everybody else. All hope

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

of the Persian recitation and the rest of the programme had to be abandoned. Miss Bhose and Davida shooed the children out into the courtyard where the sweets were to be served, decorously, caste by caste, religion by religion.

Of all the little groups into which they separated, like clusters of swarming humming birds, the old mother's group was the most popular. Taj's loyal little pupils ignored even the distribution of sweets to stand about listening to what was said of her. Their mothers crowded about as closely as their birth and station in life permitted. Davida joined them. They wouldn't allow her to sit on the ground as they were doing. They got her a stool. And accepting it she said, 'Well, after all, why not? This is no mourning. No one's dead. I'm going to give Taj an awful scolding when she gets back, treating her mother this way.' Then they clamoured forth their questions. Did the Miss then know where she was? When would she be back? Being disgraced thus for ever, would she be allowed to come back and teach in a mission school? If she could write letters from her mother's house to some lover, why couldn't she write to her mother from him? Her mother in decency had at this point to begin bewailing her as dead. Upon Davida the questions continued to fall like showers of arrows. She defended herself and the school valiantly. She had known hundreds, yes, thousands of girls who had been taught to write who had neither been kidnapped, nor gone bad. This mystery did not prove that a woman could use

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

learning only for evil purposes. Ah, but they'd known this girl and that, whose father had taught her to write, and she made an appointment at once with another woman's husband, by means of a deadly post-card, and eloped, and never again, and so on, and so on. But there is no use taking them out of school now, Davida argued. They know already how to write post-cards, those girls of mine. We can only trust them to be good, and not drive them to desperate measures. I've never eloped yet, said Davida. And neither has Miss Bhose. She feigned great offence. Oh, now the Lord forbid, her guests cried. We never said you had! We never thought of such a thing – such an evil thing of you. Not for a moment. They had to bestir themselves to pacify her. Even Taj's mother had to deny she had slandered the Miss. She grew quieter.

Some persistent little Moslem pupils came at this point and dragged her away. They must share their sweets with her. She must at least taste them. And then others laid hold of her. The woman servants of the wealthier patrons came bringing little baskets of superior sweets which they had ordered expressly for the Miss. Married pupils were coming in, baby-laden, to show her their maternal achievements. The pupils having stuffed themselves were beginning to play about, laughing, shrieking and quarrelling. The familiar beggars in the doorway were whining out insistently, impatient of the delay. The afternoon sun was blasting its fury down through their dazzling colour. The parrots in the trees in the

adjoining courtyard were screeching. The weary babes were fretting and howling, and those awakened by the uproar refreshed were laughing and gurgling. The mothers were taking their long gentle departure with repeated farewells and blessings. Davida was pulled away again to the old mother's group.

There was news for her, she must listen. One of the Moslem servants who had been handing out refreshments to the Moslem pupils began to tell her tale to Davida, having previously won all the other mourners over to her idea. There was a man in the city – Davida could believe that much of it – who had a wife – that was probable – and she had been kidnapped. 'How do you know she had?' asked Davida. 'I'll prove it to you,' said the woman. 'Somebody came and told her husband that she was living in a bazaar in the adjoining Native State of Mahlwan, and that she begged him to come and buy her back from the man who had bought her from kidnappers. So he begged and borrowed the money, telling everybody of his need. He went to Mahlwan. They saw him start off on the train. And she came back with him. Davida could go and see her, if she wanted to. Not that the woman would tell anything true. She just always said she had never been in Mahlwan. Never in her life. She had but gone to attend a wedding among her distant kinsfolk. If anyone asked slyly in what town the wedding had been, she just said it was but a small hamlet whose name they could never have heard. She wouldn't even acknowledge to her mother, whose sister had

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

married an uncle of the speaker's first husband's second wife, that she had lived disreputably in the bazaar. But that didn't matter, because a man who lived in the same street as the speaker, well, *his* cousin had been at the station on the morning the husband left for Mahlwan. If that didn't prove the woman had been kidnapped, what did it prove?

'I'm going to Mahlwan!' cried the old mother. 'Oh, how much does it cost to go to Mahlwan? If I had the money, I would go there and bring her back!'

Everybody was feeling generous – the Great Day – and the celebration – and all the visiting mothers began untying coins from the ends of the woven silk strings which held their lower garments pyjama-wise about them. The Christian teachers opened their purses.

'But you can't go – just that way – not having any definite clue!' Davida said. 'What would you do when you got there?'

'I shall trail my old bones over the earth till I come to her! What is it for, but to serve her, this body! I shall go to-morrow.'

Davida had an idea.

'Now look here, mother. I'll tell you what I'll do. If your son will go with you, or if he'll give his consent to your going, I'll pay your fare! It isn't much. But you must wait. You must ask him.'

She prevailed upon them finally to be sensible.

She didn't wait for all to leave. At the bungalow she was having guests for tea, for Christmas tea.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

Miss Bhose, stirred to great volubility by the day's excitement, joined them as soon as she could — not till all the cakes and the sweets had been cleared away from the veranda and they were sitting in the late sunshine discussing politics heatedly with the Indian pastor of the city church. His descent was obviously from the fatter and more prosperous class of Moslems. He was a simple soul and no match for Miss Bhose in debate. He sat deploring the nationalistic sympathies of the younger men of his congregation, and upon his deploring and upon their sympathies she was pouring forth a tumultuous stream of disdain which she just managed to keep from being rude. Davida from time to time interposed innocently some less irritating phase of the political situation. She was conscious of a great dark stream of ancestral contempt flowing beneath their words. Her guests were quick enough to respond to her hints. They knew their Christian duty. They loved one another through habitually gritted teeth, sincerely regretting that their brotherly affection was laboured rather than spontaneous.

They had been quite immersed in their discussion, but her thoughts wandered somewhat wearily. Naturally she was the first to hear the impending celebration. It began an indistinct noise in the distance. It became a drumming. She looked more than once towards the highway beyond the cactus hedge in the direction of that jaunty rat-a-tat-tat, rat-a-tat-tat that was getting nearer. But Miss Bhose — going fluently on about the worthlessness of all

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

Indian politicians – Miss Bhose never turned her head to consider where the noise was coming from, until suddenly –

Down upon them, through the opening in the prickly pear hedge, marched straight towards them – Bang! Bang! Bang! their drum was crying – a procession of village men. By the two young and exuberant drummers who led them Davida recognized them as the Christians of the Flowery Basti. Twenty-five men of them, all dressed in extremely dirty homespun cotton. Homespun and most untidily-wrapped turbans they had, and homespun shirts, homespun cotton sheets tied about their waists in the front to serve for trousers – tied in such a fashion that the sides blew back as they came striding along, exposing their strong bare brown legs above the knee. They advanced towards the bungalow veranda, purposefully, banging away with elation as they came nearer and nearer. In front of the Miss Sahib the drumming ceased dramatically with a terrific bang, and they bowed down.

‘Salaam,’ they cried. ‘Salaam, Miss Sahib; salaam, honourable pastor; salaam, our noble sister. The Great Day be blessed to you. To you may the Great Day be most blessed.’ And they went on with excited murmurs and greetings. They were triumphant. They were breathless. Davida rose and gave them her official blessing, and asked them to sit down on the veranda steps.

They were so full of what they had to tell they had hardly time to arrange themselves. One drum-

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

mer was their spokesman, and while he relieved himself of his instrument and tucked his skirt modestly about him, he had to quell the eagerness of the others.

'The Miss Sahib thought we weren't going to celebrate the Great Day. Did you know that, Pastor Sahib? Had you heard we were to have no festivity? But who has celebrated to the degree we have celebrated? Has there lacked anything in our rejoicing?' he asked the crowd. 'Won't the Miss Sahib be surprised now?' Like a lot of children too eager to be polite, they would have broken forth into words. But he put out his hand for silence. This tale, it was plain, deserved to be told with all circumstance. He began —

'No Christmas have we known like this one, Miss Sahib. And you thought we were all fasting and praying, didn't you? But really we have been going from village to village singing among all the Christian people we came to and being fed, and telling of our sign from God. Did you know He smiled at us this morning? Do you know God has given the Flowery Basti a sign from heaven, Miss Sahib?' And then turning to his fellows, he gloated. 'No. The Miss Sahib has not yet heard of our good news. And here before us sit also the city pastor to tell, and those honourable ladies.'

'Well, come on. Out with it! Tell us the news.' Davida exaggerated her eagerness to gratify them. She liked that young speaker. He was more of a guileless little child in his use of the childlike ver-

nacular than any man she had ever heard speak it. There was something about him which, trying to fathom, she called to herself an impregnable innocence. Brought up in the pariah quarter of that village, he must have seen with his young eyes every form of perversion before he cut his second teeth. His innocence, his righteousness was the triumph of a normal body over abnormalities. He was about nineteen now, with a nice little wife and son and a daughter, and he could read, but not very fast. Now his dark young face was alight with his heavenly importance.

'You may have heard that for some days we have been sad. Our hearts drooped and wilted. Our good pastor, he has been — he got beaten — I mean, he has been ill. Yes. He has been suffering — from an unknown disease. And some made inquiries, and some didn't, and everything — it wasn't only the women's fault this time, you will be glad to know, Miss Sahib. But there was a quarrel — though it drew near to the Great Day. God punished us all. Some were to blame and some were not to blame. Of that I will tell nothing. But we were punished unto the third and fourth generation. You heard, Miss Sahib, that the Flower of Peace flew away from us grieved!'

'Now tell the truth, brother! What really happened?'

Sitting there at her feet, he looked up at her innocently, surprised that she showed some doubt.

'God knows!' he said, turning the palms of his

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

hands upwards with a gesture of young wonder. 'God knows!' he repeated, meaning he didn't understand it himself. 'Our sin was grievous. He took the plant away.'

'Oh, all right! Go on!'

'So then we prayed, and our pastor fasted, being ashamed of us, and interceded with God on our behalf. We were to have no celebrations. He forbade us strictly going to the neighbouring villages to sing God's praises, as our custom is. The more we sang, the more we made known our hollowness. Sounding brass and clanging cymbals we would be, having not love, he said. How could we deny it? So last night we gathered and confessed our sins humbly, and some of us asked some other of us to forgive certain things which had occurred.' By this time the villagers were all squirming and leaning forward, all eager to speak. But he quietened them all dramatically –

'And then – when we got up this morning –' They were all murmuring with him now.

'When we got up this morning –'

'*There* was our plant! Our sign from God! It had forgiven us and returned to us for the Great Day!'

They waited for the miracle to impress itself.

'Where'd it come from?' Davida asked dryly.

'God knows!' said the drummer. And Davida looked from his awed face to the awed faces around him.

'Some of you had hidden it!'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

‘God forbid!’ they cried, shocked. ‘Oh, now God forbid!’

Miss Bhose and the pastor were exchanging questions.

‘Where was it this morning?’ Davida demanded.

‘It was sitting in its pot – not where it had been exactly, but an arm’s length, as it were, from its former place – nearer the gate. It hadn’t dug itself in. But it had taken up a new home in our garden.’

Miss Bhose would be kept out of this miracle no longer.

‘What flower was this?’ she demanded of Davida.

So Davida related the history of the poinsettia as shortly as possible.

‘Poinsettia?’ asked the pastor.

‘Yes. This flower here,’ explained Davida. The pastor looked and regretted that he had not realized its Christian nature sooner.

‘And look,’ cried the young drummer to his friends. ‘Pots and pots of it on the Lady’s veranda, and behold how it thrives under her disposition, brothers!’ The fallacy was fast become pathetic enough to bore Davida. But Miss Bhose took up the parable gladly. Was it not the Master’s promise that we should remove mountains, she asked? What was this mere flower-pot to a mountain? Do not the little hills skip like lambs before Him? What wonder, then, if a small vegetable hops about to do His will. These dear simple villagers He had indeed given a loving sign to. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings He wills to have

perfected praise. The event suited her imagination. She loved at times to hold forth to villagers. She threatened often to throw over her high-caste school and go forth with Davida into the villages of the poor and the despised who received the teaching gladly. So she beamed upon the men and congratulated them upon God's sweet smile upon them, and exhorted them to live in peace with all men – remembering perhaps how she had but now refrained from telling her honoured pastor what a fool he was politically.

And the pastor took up the parable and it grew richer in his imaginative mouth. And the drummer untied the corner of his shawl and showed the coppers and silver – three rupees and seven annas – about four shillings – the miracle had brought forth in free-will offerings for the poor. He was but waiting for a chance to go on with his story. As soon as the forgiving flower-pot had been found in the morning, all the Christians had come running together to behold it, and the pastor had prayed and thanked God fervently, and the singers had taken their drums and gone forth to sing as they had never sung before. And in every village people had given them something, sweets or pennies, and the chief alderman had given the pastor a large chicken for his dinner on the Great Day – he was ill, poor man, and unable to go about to villages carolling – and three rupees to buy a Christmas treat for the little children.

How was the pastor? Wasn't he better yet? Davida had to ask. And the city pastor took up the question.

'What is all this tale I hear about this basti, Miss

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

Sahib? Was he beaten, really, with the Sahib, as they say?’

Davida saw every villager prick up his ears for her answer. So she said lightly –

‘How do I know what tales you hear, Padre Sahib!’

‘No. But you were there yourself that morning the Sahib came back last pay-day. When we were all waiting.’ But he saw Davida didn’t like his questioning. He turned accordingly to the villagers.

‘You see, my brothers in Christ, what a thing it is to have a reputation for integrity! If it had been one of us, now, who had come back alone and unexplaining, people would have said we had been after some man’s wife.’

And then – from the crowd of villagers, there was a murmur, a sound that had been hushed by a dozen all but invisible gestures almost before it was made. But Davida had heard it. She had seen its repression. She knew very well that some indiscreet one there had murmured –

‘I hear they *are* saying that – about the Sahib.’

Now, naturally, Davida delighted in finding out things which were intended to be hidden from missionaries; and it annoyed her not to be able to challenge the insinuation. She turned suddenly and looked at Miss Bhose and the pastor’s wife.

‘Funny, isn’t it?’ Davida asked them. ‘They say in our country that women are curious! More curious than men. But we, sisters, never hear any of these underhand rumours. We never hear anything of this interesting gossip. Now why is that?’

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

Her tone made the men laugh. That was the best she could do for the Sahib.

Silly old thing, he was, to let this mystery go on accumulating momentum. He might be counting too much on his reputation. And now she could only make herself a partner in the mystifying. For not one of those villagers but would be convinced that she knew all about the cause of their pastor's ill-health.

Where was the Sahib now? they asked. They must go at once to tell him about their miracle. But he had gone to a distant village for a celebration, she told them, and he wouldn't be back till late. Perhaps they had better not wait for him. She would tell him the news.

But they had lots of time, they assured her. They would wait till he came. They wanted to tell him the news themselves. They went on to report what the Christians of each village had said about the miracle. They hadn't believed it at first. Of course, just at first, even the people of the Flowery Basti wouldn't believe their ears – nor their eyes. It was the son of the lame Fatma who had seen it first, an unimportant little boy.

Davida changed the subject when she could. Wouldn't they sing for Miss Bhose, one of the new songs?

Wouldn't they just! Never had their hearts been so full of praise, their voices so tuneful. The drummer took up the drum and fingered a spirited prelude, then threw back his head and burst forth into song.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'ONCE there was a GENTleman who HAD two SONS.

And the YOUNGest said to HIM, "I WANT some MONEY!" Bang, bang, BANG!

A jaunty interlude, the prodigal son was in the drummer's version. They brought him home from the far country, delivering him from the trite swine of familiarity. They brought forth all the wedding garments of rhythm to adorn him. He was a story that grasped them, and they put rings on his fingers as he did it. And they put shoes on his feet, the preparation of the gospel of peace, so that he danced and played about for their delight. And they made merry in the Christmas sunlight, for he had been dead and was live again, living in their fields and their houses, bang, bang, BANG!

But Davida sat watching the man's thumb and little finger beating the accompaniments out of that disreputable little drum. It looked so simple – till you tried it – like so many of the simplicities about her. She was reduced to wonder. She remembered Chicago, and thought – wasn't it Christianity itself that was the prodigal, perhaps, strayed to feed swine among Western peoples who bullied and starved and debased it? Why should it not rise and come back to its Eastern father, to its home and rejoicing people? What could it ever be, in a city like New York, but a ragged and craven menial? But sometimes it seemed perhaps here, in Aiyanianwala, among men like these . . .

CHAPTER V

THE way in which John Ramsey refrained, grinning, from any comment on Davida's miracle annoyed her, though she wouldn't give him the satisfaction of knowing it. She went to the Flowery Basti as soon as she could to find out what had really happened, straight to the pastor's house.

She found him more of a lank skeleton than ever, with eyes more mournful and a tongue less given to rash exaggeration. He got up off the bed where he had been sitting in the sun, unwrapped the thickly padded quilt from around him, arranged his turban more respectfully, and insisted that there had not been anything wrong with him. Besides, he had recovered from it. He knew nothing about the mechanics of the late wonder. He just praised God for it. His people, who were themselves the least among Christians, the Great Father had naturally chosen to instruct by means of a penny flower-pot. The Miss Sahib ought to be pleased that her gift had served so high a purpose. He thought it safe to say that the Christians had never before been looked upon with such favour by the whole high-caste village. 'I reminded them,' he said, lifting his grave eyes slowly towards her, 'that the Moslems year in and year out fight and maul each other, occasionally resorting to murderous assaults, and no sign comes from heaven to them. The Hindus live in idolatry, oppressing the poor by usury, and go unreprieved. But just let God's own poor begin quarrelling a

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

little, after the fashion of the world, and He calls them up sharply, reminding them of what befits the sons of God. And what could they say to that? Because there they were, looking over the wall at the flower which had returned after the absence they had seen also.' The women and the girls were even more stubborn in their faith. Davida protested to them sturdily that she had not prophesied that the flower would leave them. She had but meant that lovely things ought to make us think of lovely actions. It sounded a lame explanation. And when she announced that she intended taking the flower home, they rose and fell upon her with entreaty. Let them have their heavenly plant. They would not give it up. They were so kind to one another now in its presence. They never raised their voices even to curse the infuriating old oxen any more. She finally agreed when they promised not to encourage people from other villages to come and look at it, insisting that by the time its upper brilliant scarlet leaves were fading she would take it back to her bungalow, to cut into bits for the next year.

She found the pastor waiting for her on the veranda a few days later.

'I promised to come and tell you when I learned anything more about the Blessed Father's use of your flower,' he said. 'This is the first time I have been in town since — since my recent illness. You must promise not to make public what I tell you.'

She refused to promise. 'I am determined to have that explained to everybody. We can't do this —

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

imposing on their credulity this way, Padre. I am surprised that you consider such a thing.'

He rose in all courtesy to depart with the story untold. She detained him.

'It was told me,' he said, 'by one whose spiritual adviser I am in the depth of secrecy. I judge it best not to make it public.'

'Well, it will become public, anyway. You know that. Whatever is whispered in the ear will be shouted from the housetop in this land.'

'I take that to refer to the ears of the heathen, not to the ears of Christian men.'

She deplored the superstitious attitude of the village to the event. He remained unmoved. Finally, out of sheer curiosity, she promised, to her immediate regret, not to tell what he revealed to her.

'It concerns the chief Alderman. And he knows that there is nothing among us not confided to your safe and Christian ears. You know that for a long time he has publicly spoken for us on all occasions — of dispute and trouble. He has defended us strongly. And that is, as you may have guessed, because in his deep heart he is a Christian, worshipping our Lord rather than his prophet. "Come unto Me and I will give you rest" — from many marriages, he interprets it, Miss Sahib. You know his oldest wife. I need say no more. The prophet Mohammed, he goes so far as to say, had not taught his people the way of peace in households. Well, it happened of late, as it often does, that his home was

made intolerable to him by the quarrelling of his women, so that he fled in despair from their tongues and went to visit his brother, who is, by the grace of God, he says, a widower. He had heard, of course, of the plant of peace – he knows all our affairs intimately. And as he returned heavy-hearted to his house for necessary business, he drew near to the village – it was by night, and the plan came to him, he says, from the prophet Jesus. It was night, as I said – he chose to return then for the sake of peace, when the family would be sleeping – when the plan came to him, and he climbed my wall and took the plant home with him, carefully, secretly locked it away in an empty back room, to see if it would bring peace to his family.'

'Oh, Padre Sahib!'

'Miss Sahib, God works in wonderful ways to bring that man to the knowledge of the truth. It was midnight, he says, when he got the plant put away safely. And will you believe it? by ten o'clock the next morning – what do you think had happened?'

'I'm sure I can't imagine!'

'I'm sure you can't. By ten o'clock a messenger arrived from the chief wife's home saying she must come at once. She left hurriedly, and quietness descended upon the family.'

'Padre Sahib!'

'That man will be a Christian yet, Miss Sahib. For hear the rest. He told me he enjoyed those days gingerly, not really having faith in God. But by the fourth day another messenger arrived, saying that

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

his wife would be detained for some time. It may be weeks. We meanwhile were praying and humbling ourselves before God for our sins. And the Great Day was drawing near. He had reverence for the good plant, too much to destroy it. So the night before Christmas he climbed the wall again and restored it to its place hastily, not digging it in right. Because, of course, he dares not tell his fellow-Moslems how sincerely he worships our Lord. Indeed, only recently some one taunted him with being a Christian openly, and he had to beat him thoroughly for the insult.'

'Padre Sahib, you must tell your people what happened. Without mentioning names, of course.'

'They would know the name, without my mentioning it.'

'I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll tell Ramsey Sahib and let him decide.'

'Certainly. The Sahib would never counsel that I break my word to the Alderman.'

'Will you promise to abide by his decision?'

'I can't say that I will. I'll abide by my own decision. I have your promise.'

'But you won't mind if I talk it over with the Sahib?'

'That deep well of confidence? He tells nothing. Certainly you may tell him. I'll tell him myself when I get a moment alone with him.'

'I wish I had never promised you that.'

The pastor neither exulted nor worried.

'But you have promised me,' he said securely.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'But don't you see,' Davida went on impatiently, 'it's the merest coincidence. You know it! Somebody got ill and they sent for that woman. Why did they send for her, anyway? Isn't she back yet?'

The Indian looked about him circumspectly. He lowered his voice, so that he had to speak directly and plainly to be heard.

'That,' he said, 'is perhaps the strangest part of it all. You could never imagine why she was sent for.'

'Well, tell me, then.'

He hesitated. He sighed.

'She had a daughter, you know, by a first husband. The daughter lives a long way – towards Ferozepur. And her husband – Miss Sahib – he had been arrested – and put in jail. And the little children are left defenceless –'

'Why?'

'He is charged with a – serious matter. Miss Sahib, he was arrested – for kidnapping!'

'Ah.' Davida moved in her chair impatiently. 'Kidnapping!' she said. 'I live here ten years and never hear the word! And now nobody talks of anything else. I'm tired of it all. You'll be thinking they've got me next.'

She was right.

It was that very night that Jalal thought the kidnappers had got her.

The extraordinary thing was that it was so long before anyone realized what had happened. John Ramsey stopped at the bungalow that day as usual, after tea-time. She wasn't in then, but the lights

were lit and the fire burning, and he went on, thinking he would run in again later. Other things interfered and he went to bed without any misgivings, to reproach himself afterwards most bitterly. The sweeper said *he* wasn't to blame. He had lit the lamps and the fire, and he didn't know that the mistress wouldn't put them out as usual. The cook said he couldn't be blamed. He had waited dinner till half-past nine, and then gone to his home in the city. The night-watchman tried to make out that it wasn't his fault. He didn't say how late he had been in coming for his vigil. He couldn't explain why he hadn't seen sooner that the stable was open and empty. The teachers who lived in the rooms adjoining the back veranda said, weeping, that they had been lonely without the Miss Sahib, but they thought she had gone out to some dinner with the English, as she sometimes did. And they had taken the Dying Sister's bed into their room, because she was afraid and couldn't sleep without the protection of a Miss in the bungalow.

It was only the next morning that the watchman, waking from a sound night's sleep, saw that the horse was missing, and ran to wake the syce. And he found the syce was missing, and the trap, and went to consult the cook, who had just arrived to make the morning tea. And the cook said contemptuously, as he always spoke to the lazy low-caste Christian, that he didn't know where the Mistress was. Let the watchman go and ask the young Christian teachers. So the watchman went

and asked the teachers. They said, 'Hail! Isn't she back yet? Go and ask Miss Bhose.' But he wouldn't, because he knew how well he had slept and how long. He went and smoked his pipe in the cook-house veranda. And the teachers went across to Miss Bhose and told her. And she, washing her morning face in her courtyard, bade them run at once and call the watchman. And he came reluctantly. Miss Bhose was always trying to give him orders, he grumbled daily, as if he was her servant. So he hummed and hawed, and said it wasn't his place to go and ask the Sahib where the Miss Sahib was. But Miss Bhose's alarmed tongue drove him across the compound and the few steps down the road to the Sahib's bungalow in great speed.

Now John Ramsey was at his morning's devotions, and his servants knew that he didn't like being disturbed. So the watchman sat down and smoked the water-pipe with them, until it would be time for the Sahib's tea to be taken in. And then reluctantly, he begged leave to speak to the Sahib.

'Sir, your Honour,' he said, shifting and tugging and adjusting his draperies, 'I don't want to trouble you. But a funny thing has happened. The Miss Sahib's horse is stolen.'

'Her horse? Well, how'd that happen? I'll come over at once.'

'Your Honour, it's a funny thing! She isn't there.'

'She isn't where?'

'The Miss Sahib. Where is the Miss Sahib?'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'Isn't she there? What do you mean?'

'She didn't come home! We don't know where she is!'

'Like a lion the Sahib, he pounced upon me at this,' the watchman complained to the cook later. 'He pounced upon me crying and roaring.'

His servants saw him striding down the path towards Davida's bungalow, and the watchman muffled and wrapped in his cotton filthiness running along beside him trying to answer his questions. The cook hurried respectfully out to meet him, and the Sahib pounced roaring upon the cook.

'Sir, she climbed into her trap yesterday at noon, as usual, and she drove out of that gate. I, Sir, I never ask her where she is going. It would not be proper, and I haven't an idea.'

The three men ran into the bungalow. There in the living-room, in the full light of the morning, the large lamp was flickering away. The Sahib stared like a man struck dead, the cook said afterwards. And then he deliberately went and knocked at Davida's bedroom door.

He knocked and he knocked. And he was pale. And:

'Open the door!' he said to the sweeper, who had joined them. He was afraid of what he might see, they said.

The four men looked in. The bed was undisturbed.

Across the room went the Sahib. He opened the doors into the back veranda. He called the teachers.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

His tone brought them forth throwing their veils about them.

'What's this? Why didn't some of you come to me before? Where's the Miss Sahib?'

They didn't know. Miss Bhose, who had been waiting with anxiety to hear what the Sahib would say, came hurrying heavily across the compound.

'This is very bad, Sir!' she said. 'These are dangerous times! I sent for you.' And Ramsey, cross-questioning her, began to realize the absurdity of the situation - a young woman like Davida going out alone, nobody knew where, day by day, no one knew even in what direction, into any one of a thousand villages.

'She has the old syce with her,' they reminded him. 'He knows every step of the district. Nothing could have happened to her,' they said. 'Who ever heard of anything happening to a Miss Sahib? She would be somewhere engaged in good works, soothing the brow of the fevered,' the cook opined. But Ramsey said, curtly:

'Go and inquire which road she went.' There was a little village within a hundred yards of the mission compound. 'Go and ask if anyone saw her pass there yesterday noon.' If no one had seen her - if she had turned into the other road by which she skirted the city to get to the villages beyond it - well, how could they find her then!

Miss Bhose boldly disapproved of the instructions. She tried to calm him. Of course nothing had happened to her, she maintained. She saw the

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

Sahib's eyes had grown wild with fear, so that when he answered testily that she might have had an accident and be needing their help, she couldn't imagine what he was referring to. He spoke sharply to them all, and then he hurried back to his compound and sent all his own servants out to the villages which, lying near by on the highways, might have seen the Miss Sahib. He hurried even his own cook away. The cook, passing through Davida's compound, stopped to tell his surprising orders to the teachers who stood wide-eyed discussing the situation. They should have been cooking their own breakfasts, but the dying sister, sitting on the veranda, was crying in terror, and it took away their appetite. Miss Bhose, after an hour, rounded them up and sent them away to the school which opened at ten. And she said she would be along herself just as soon as the Miss Sahib returned.

The servants reported eagerly, one after the other. The Miss Sahib had been seen going east about noon, according to the first one. According to the second she had been seen exactly at twelve by a man whose brother owned a watch, going straight south. The third reported he had found exactly the road on which she passed northward at lunch time yesterday – if it was Thursday to-day. If it was Wednesday – she had passed in the afternoon. And soon afterwards she was seen by many people driving along the bazaar as usual to the city school.

So then Ramsey sent for all the Christian men he could find – schoolmasters and pastors and clerks –

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

and told them to leave their work and join the search for the Miss Sahib, whose horse had probably run away with her. He himself was going in the direction of the Flowery Basti, and the first bit of authentic news was to be brought to him there.

'We hadn't heard you were missing,' Begum said to Davida afterwards. 'The Father of Bobby was giving the older ones a writing-lesson when the Sahib burst into the courtyard, and at the sight of his face a powerful chill came over me. Without salaams he called us aside, sharply – into the room, and shut the door, to keep the people out. Me, too, he would have kept out. But I was tired of their secrets. I pushed in. When had you been there? he asked us, and he kept looking in a speaking way at the Father of Bobby. "She's lost. And she was seen yesterday afternoon going towards Pir Khanwala." The Father of Bobby cried out. But I cried out louder. I cried "Aie! Woe is me! Then the kidnappers have got her!" Then the Sahib turned fiercely upon me. "Who says there are kidnappers in Pir Khanwala?" he asked, tearing my flesh with his word. I cried and I said, "Every one says it, and they beat my husband. And you know it!" And he looked frightfully to the Father of Bobby and he said, "Do you think they are kidnappers?" And the father of Bobby said, "It may well be that they are!" And at that all the Sahib's joints and bones turned to water, and he trembled flowingly, and he sat down on the bed. And he covered his face with his hands, like a man praying. And he jumped up and said,

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

"Send the children to the fields to call the men in. Tell them to bring sticks and clubs." And I wept. And the women wept violently. And he said, "Keep still!" But knowing your fate we could not. And he stood whispering to the Father of Bobby. And his eyes had sunk into his face.

'So the men came running hastily, leaving their oxen to the small children. And first he tried to keep the non-Christians out of it, but some Moslems had come running, too, to see what the excitement was. So then he made them all sit down as if for church, for a minute. It was still, like death, when he spoke, and his eyes had sunk far into his head. He said you were lost. He said they had seen you going towards Pir Khanwala. And he feared that in that village there lived violent men. At that, some of the Moslems agreed, murmuring, but others hushed them strongly. He said you had spoken of going there to find out something about a teacher of yours. And since it might possibly be that you had gone in spite of his advice, and maybe they were detaining you – for some purpose – he had called the men together to go with him to find out if you were there. Peacefully they were to go with him. Very peacefully. No one was to speak a word of strife, or lift a stick, except at his command. And then he prayed, but hastily, for his voice dripped tears at every moment. He urged the Moslems not to come. But some would go. So they set out hastily, a great crowd of children following them. But he turned fiercely – he spoke softly to no one that day – and

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

sent the little ones back. The men made him get into his trap and ride, though the horse was wet with sweat when he arrived, for he was sick-looking. So he took the Father of Bobby with him. "Make the horse run very fast," our men said to him, "for we are strong farmers and we can keep up with him running." The young men ran ahead like deer across the fields. And we stood there at the end of the lane weeping, with many Moslem women who had gathered. And our men who came from the fields late we sent chasing after them. We looked after them till they were as small as gnats. And we went back to our courtyard. The whole village of women gathered and we had a great mourning, praying all the time. God have mercy on her! God have mercy! we prayed all the afternoon, rocking back and forth.'

That evening Davida, after such a night as she had never dreamed of spending, alighted from the train in the deep twilight, at her own station. She had no baggage, not even a handbag. Her ticket she pulled out of the pocket of the long old coat which she wore to villages. It seemed to her the men on the station stared at her more than usual. But when she was very tired it always seemed to her that they stared more than usual. The new station-master was himself taking tickets at the gate, and he greeted her too effusively to please her. She snubbed him promptly. All the tonga drivers as usual rushed at her, clamouring for the privilege of taking her to the bungalow. She chose the old garrulous one, and when he said

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

fervently, 'God bless you! These are terrible times of evil!' she answered, 'Look where you're driving. You just missed that child!' He refrained from addressing her again. He rode on the front seat, facing forward, and she rode on the back seat, facing backward, and they went jogging along towards the compound.

When they came to the gate, she turned to look at the house. She saw the lights weren't lit. 'There'll be no fire either,' she said to herself, sighing. 'That old sweeper won't have got a thing ready —' There was a group of men, not her servants, about the cook-house, she was noticing — when a great cry rang out. Was that the cook's voice?

'Ai! The Miss Sahib! *Here* she is! Hia, Watchman! Tell the news. She's *HERE!*'

What a shriek of impertinence, from the cook of all people! And then as that thought came into her mind, as his cry rang out, men began running towards her — from the cook-house, from the servants' houses from beyond the bungalow. By the time she began alighting at the veranda she was hemmed about, shut in, by ejaculating, sighing, praying idiots, her own familiar men all gone mad apparently. And she hadn't yet said sternly, 'What do you mean by this?' when the teachers began arriving, throwing themselves upon her, breathing out benediction and thanksgiving. Her heart sank. It was plain something had happened in her absence. And before she had demanded what it was, in the doorway of the living-room there came Miss Bhose, who threw her-

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

self down in the rocking-chair and cried aloud, effectively. Everybody was talking at once. Thank God! Thank God! You aren't hurt? How did you escape? Are you wounded? Where's the horse? Did you come by train? Run and tell the Sahib, somebody. Tell the Police Sahib. Oh, Lord God, our sadness is over! And Miss Bhose was saying, sobbing, 'I hope I'll never have to live through such another day!' Davida, looking around for an explanation, saw tears in the cook's eyes. A presentiment took hold of her.

'Where's the syce?'

'We don't know. We don't care. Now *you're* here! That's all we care about.'

The men, all talking at once, were commanding some one to run and tell the news to the messenger the Police Sahib had left for the purpose.

She sat down suddenly. She was too tired. She felt faint.

'What's the Police Sahib got to do with it?' She heard them all answering at once:

He'd gone to rescue her. With six tonga loads of policemen. And the Doctor Sahib. And Ramsey Sahib. And:

'Oh, you don't mean it! You aren't telling me the truth,' she cried, terrified. She made them hush. She demanded an explanation of Miss Bhose.

'The Sahib was like a man beset by devils. From the moment he heard you were lost—'

'Lost!' cried Davida indignantly.

'Yes! He—'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'Do you mean to say you didn't get my message? Didn't you know where I was?'

'We knew the kidnappers had you. We knew that in Pir Khanwala —'

David's temper snapped.

'Don't say kidnappers to me! Didn't the syce tell you where I was? You *never* did it! The Sahib never went and reported me to the police!'

They were all indignantly silent before her rage.

'The whole district is out hunting for you. The syce, too, is missing. They knew — we all knew that you had gone to Pir Khanwala —'

'I haven't been within ten miles of Pir Khanwala! Who said I was there?' She was so angry she was afraid of herself, afraid of saying aloud, before those Indians, what she thought of John Ramsey. This was *too* much! If he had given her away — never would she forgive such an outrage! Then, realizing the situation, she cried poignantly:

'Oh, you don't *mean* it! You don't mean policemen have gone after me, really? Oh, for goodness sake, run after them! Send some one to call them back! Don't let them go and arrest some one!'

They'd do that. The Police Sahib had left a man with a motor-cycle to bring them any news that might come of her.

'How long have they been gone?' she exclaimed. 'Oh, make him hurry! I haven't been within ten miles of Pir Khanwala. I've been in Bhagwan! I sent the syce to tell you. Didn't he come home? Where is he?'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

They didn't know. The watchman came back into the room. He had given the messenger the news. She scolded him because the syce had not come home with word of her. She saw all the recent joy at her return turned to indignation.

She groaned. 'You know – they will *arrest* some one! Innocent men! I've never even been *near* Pir Khanwala. I went to Bhagwan. Some men from there met on the road yesterday, and told me that little Miriam, my teacher, was dying – she was in labour – and they made me go with them. And when I saw she couldn't be saved any other way I took her to the hospital – I drove half the night, across fields, to the other railway, and the baby was born this morning. In the hospital. Then I had a sleep and went shopping, and got the train home. It never entered my mind – I never *thought* of the Sahib not knowing. I could have telegraphed. The syce ought to have been here, at least by daylight, this morning. I'd like to know what's become of him! I never spent such a night in my life. And this is what I get for it!' She wanted to sit down and cry. 'I'll never forgive John Ramsey as long as I live!' she vowed. She thought of the Police Sahib, whom she despised, returning angrily from his wild-goose chase to censure her officially. The whole mission would deplore it. And as for the poor villagers –

'Light me a fire!' she commanded the sweeper. 'Go on about your work!' She couldn't sit still. She walked about the room. She looked at her teachers.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

She looked at Miss Bhose. 'I'm sorry I made such a lot of trouble. But I saved Miriam. Whatever made the Sahib do it? I never would have *thought* of him doing such a trick. It makes me sick to think of the Police Sahib going out there —'

'It may be all for the best. If they didn't find you, they may find Taj!' said Miss Bhose, wiping her eyes with her veil. 'They'll get the kidnappers anyway, thank God!'

'But who said I'd gone to that place? What made the Sahib believe it? He might have known it wasn't true!'

By this time Davida had sat down, and the watchman's wife was massaging her legs.

'Everybody believed it. The Sahib went there, and they denied it. And then the Sister here she told him what house to go to, what house they shut women up in —'

'No!' said the dying sister suddenly. She hadn't spoken before. She sat huddled between Davida's chair and the fireplace. 'No! I didn't tell him anything, Miss Sahib!'

Miss Bhose clucked in annoyance.

'The Sahib heard what she said, and that convinced him. He ran then quickly to the police —'

'No, I didn't say anything, Miss Sahib. I was silent. Like the dead!' She peered blinking into Davida's face. She looked about, from one woman to the other, imploringly. 'I wasn't even here. I wasn't in this house at all!'

'I'm sure you weren't,' said Davida.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'Anyway, now they know where those wicked men are. Before, they only guessed, and couldn't do anything. But now they will arrest them. It looked like an attacking army, all the tongas disappearing in a cloud of dust down the road.'

While the teachers still lingered, the cook came in, apologetically – the haughty cook, the disapproving cook, who had moved silently about the house for twenty years without vouchsafing a superfluous word, but who had now, this evening, lifted up his voice in a great cry of joy and shed for her an unfeigned tear or two. Now, he said, having given her up for dead, and being all the day engaged in her recovering, he had prepared no pudding for dinner. Might he suggest that, considering the occasion, a tin of the foreign peaches might be opened?

'Yes,' said Davida. 'And get something ready for the Sahib, too. I suppose he won't have any supper cooked.'

Ah! the Sahib! they groaned. Why he hadn't eaten a bite the whole day. He was like a wedding veil trampled in the mud. There was scarcely breath left in his august nostrils. 'He'll be older still when I've told him what I think of him,' Davida said to herself. 'I don't suppose I'd dare offer the other men dinner. They'll wipe their feet on me, fairly. I'd better get the teachers away before they get here to dress me down. I don't intend to let them hear it.'

Left alone, she was too excited to go and wash up. She walked about the room trying to estimate the

extent of the blunder. The whole district would know that she had been lost for a night. There would be a sweet scandal lingering a long time about that bare fact. Her suspicious neighbours would be convinced of what they had always suspected about her nocturnal pastimes. The story about the sick teacher – she could see them lifting their eyebrows about that. Here I am, she fussed, thirty-five years old, and if I can't stay out of bed after ten o'clock without John Ramsey going to report me to the police, I may as well give up! After the time I had! Driving all the way, not knowing but what she might die any minute! Taking all the risk of being blamed for her death if she did die! It would be perfectly impossible to explain her conduct to that odious and angry Englishman. What was the life of one mere village teacher to him! He might make any amount of trouble – being what he was – a disgusting, red-faced, sneering creature.

She wouldn't have been nearly so much disturbed if he had been the usual sort of English official. But this man – a betrayer of his race and nation, he was, this present inspector. Aiyanianwala had in the days of the Mutiny and for a long time after been much more important administratively than it had been of late. And the early officials, together with the predecessors of John Ramsey, perhaps, had established such a reputation for integrity that until recently it had never occurred to the ordinary villager of that district that an Englishman could lie. And as for bribes – you had scarcely suggested it to them till

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

into prison you were clapped. Those former young Sahibs had become great men, governors and ministers, whispering now their grey-haired wisdom into the ear of the King. But Aiyanianwala had shrunk steadily into insignificance, until now — there were usually temporary minor officials and now a Police Sahib whose venality was a scandal in the bazaar, who had been sent down there, the Indians said, because of the corruption of his dealings in a more important place. Naturally, all who hated the English Raj were gloating over his dishonour. The native police had been a scandal, had it? they asked spitefully. Well, here was an Englishman who raked in bribes with a cunning no Indian ever possessed. And this exaggeration, as John Ramsey said, was the more to be deplored because of the truth beneath it. As like as not, nowadays if he ventured to preach about the worth of exactness, the loveliness of truth, some one in the crowd would say, jeering, 'How about the Police Sahib? Isn't he a Christian?' And once when Ramsey had retorted, 'How about such a one? Was his word not stronger than a bond to rely upon? How about such a one? Was not his promise better than an oath?' a young upstart had replied, 'Our fathers were but foolish men, Sahib, without learning and degrees. They believed whatever a white man said. But now that we have got our eyes open we see there is no difference between their lies and our own — except maybe a few men of God like yourself.'

And now — with this lover of bribes and corrup-

tion, John Ramsey was riding like a mad man out through the night to rescue her from —

She groaned aloud. 'I'd give anything I possess in this world if this hadn't happened,' she thought. 'I must be calm. I must be fair. But I'll never trust John Ramsey again — as long as I live. Never,' she vowed. 'And I won't stand one word of impertinence from that red-faced Police Sahib. I won't take the blame of this. Let him swear at Ramsey. I did all I could. I trusted my message to a servant who has been trusted in this compound for years. I always knew he was a fraud, a rogue. But Miss Monroe would keep him on. I won't be blamed for it. I'll go and wash up. I'll put on my best house-frock, and I'll powder my nose, and sit down and wait for them. And they can just watch their step, coming in here to blame me for this! I won't even ask them to sit down if they come here. I won't ask them in.'

By the time she got her good little house-frock on she felt calmer. She heard one clock in the town strike eight, and she went and sat down to her dinner. Twenty minutes later the second clock struck eight. Twenty minutes later the third one struck eight. She was sitting by the fire, waiting apprehensively, when twenty minutes later still the first clock struck nine. At least, usually she could be sure they were twenty minutes apart, the neighbouring timepieces. The men's delay showed plainly that the messenger couldn't have overtaken them before they had got to the village to carry on their work of injustice —

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

arresting men for kidnapping HER, Davida Baillie. Whenever she thought of that, she grew stiff with anger. Just let John Ramsey wait till I tell him what I think –

There they were – tongas coming in the gate – men's steps on the veranda – Ramsey was opening the door for them – the tall Station doctor in a huge long coat, swathed in mufflers; and the Police Sahib, his red face peering out from a sheepskin collar turned up above his ears – not angry – that was her first thought, but gay, almost; and Ramsey, cold, small, shrivelled and shabby, praying – 'Oh Davida! Thank God! You sitting here by the fire!'

The doctor was grinning at her.

'You did give us a fright!' He seemed amused – could it be?

'It's the best day's work *you* ever did!' The police officer seemed for once almost enthusiastic about missionaries.

'Oh Miss Sahib!' sighed Ramsey. He sank down into a chair. The other two stood warming their hands at the fire.

'Draw up!' said the policeman to Ramsey solicitously, as if it was his fire. He did look ill, that rash, untrustworthy old man.

'Sahib!' cried Davida to him, 'you got my message? You didn't go and arrest anybody – you didn't accuse anybody of anything?' She was imploring them all to reassure her. 'It wasn't my fault. I'm sorry! Are you ill, Sahib? I'll get you something hot to drink. But you didn't arrest

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

anybody?' She was going to the door to call the cook.

'Seven men! Seven men!' exclaimed the policeman.

'Brought them back with us' – turning down his collar, smoothing down his hair, complacently – 'thanks to your little jaunt –'

Davida turned from her errand to him. 'Oh, you *didn't*! Don't you understand yet! I wasn't kidnapped! Nobody hurt me! Didn't you get my message?'

'Oh, rather –! Indeed we did!' The silly old red-faced fool beamed with satisfaction. Then Ramsey, pitying her, said wearily:

'Don't worry, Miss Sahib. It wasn't for – detaining *you* that they took them!'

'Oh!' She stopped short, blankly. She looked from one man to the other. The policeman wouldn't say a word. It was an effort for Ramsey to speak.

'It wasn't for kidnapping you. It was – for kidnapping *me* they arrested them. *I* was kidnapped. But I didn't know it.'

'You?'

'Yes.'

'How's your patient?' the doctor was asking. He was chaffing her, wasn't he? 'I guessed all along you were up to something like that! I'd rather have charge of a cholera epidemic – of famine relief – than a lady missionary –'

'Nobody has got charge of me! Anyway, the patient is living, and that's more than she would

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

have been if I hadn't taken her to the hospital. The doctor said so.'

'The child might have been born in the train.'

'Suppose it had! That's a better place than the house she was in! I worked all night! I never slept a wink till the next morning. And now I get hauled over the coals for it as if—'

'Not at all. We congratulate you! It's the best night's work you ever did!' He was saying that again, grinning.

'Why? You mean—are they really kidnappers then? How do you know they are?'

'Ramsey'll tell you that,' the policeman said, starting to leave. 'We just looked in to see you were unhurt. A nice warm fire you've got!' Idiot, chuckling to himself—was he making fun of her for some reason? Ramsey had risen with an effort, to go out with them.

'No, you don't!' she commanded him. 'You're going to have dinner here, in front of the fire. We've got to have a talk about this!'

'Yes,' he said. 'I think I ought to tell you to-night. Let me go and wash up first, and I'll come back.'

He was old—humble—spent. And he had not uttered a word of reproach to her. Not one of them had. She didn't know what to make of them. Ramsey was standing there looking at her, sickened, appealing to her. Then in a flash she understood. The Sahib, as she had basely wished, was in a mess, for once. It was that morning he had returned,

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

beaten like a drunkard. He was eating a bitter mess of shame, her dear brother before God, the sweet old lamb that he was! If that police officer dared to touch John Ramsey – if he had got him into trouble –

‘Come back quickly!’ she whispered. ‘It’s all right. I know it is.’

CHAPTER VI

Washed and brushed, he sat in front of the fire eating his warmed-over supper from the tea-table. His ruddy auburn hair, turning grey now, was so thin it scarcely covered the bald place on the top of his head. His delicate girlish face was haggard. He huddled limply in the most comfortable chair. She had insisted heroically upon his eating before he began to talk. She had seen him lift his hand wearily towards his head, sitting there.

‘I – feel – dazed –’ he said.

‘I think you might!’ she commented. ‘Drink your soup while it’s hot.’

‘It’s all so out – of my experience. I don’t know where to begin.’ When the cook had set the coffee down before him and had withdrawn, he tried to pull himself together for an explanation. ‘If I don’t make myself clear, ask me questions,’ he begged. ‘All the way in I was thinking how to tell you. You remember that December pay-day? Well, that day – the day before, you know – I had gone to the Flowery Basti, driven there, in the morning. I took the pastor Jalal with me, walking – the road is impossible beyond there. We walked to Pardan, and were delayed starting back. It was almost dark when we left, and as we were passing through Pir Khanwala – we had got through it, and we were just going out, walking fast, out of the weavers’ alley there – but you don’t know the village – a man ran out of a house behind us, calling for help.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

"Sahib! Sahib!" he called wildly. "They're killing her! Save us! Save us!" so – so sort of desperately that naturally we turned round, and we both ran towards him, with him – he was first, and I was second – and into a house – it 'didn't take us a minute, you know – just a few steps, and into a courtyard full of men – excited. And before I knew what had happened, somebody grabbed me and Jalal, and half threw us down. There were thirty men there, I suppose, and of course I was taken by surprise – absolutely, of course. I have been in this district twenty-five years, and no one has ever laid a hand on me all that time. They were all shouting, and I was going to quiet them, as 'usual, but before I could say a word they had pushed me – kicked me – into a little dark stable sort of a room, and locked the door.'

'Why, Sahib!'

'I know it. Isn't it incredible! I think some one hit me over the head. I was dizzy – sort of reeling. Of course, when I collected my wits, I began trying to get out of it. I shouted at them. I asked them what they meant. I ordered them to let me out of there at once. I kicked the door, and pounded, and tried to break it down. There had been a lot of shouting – excitement – outside. All of a sudden it grew quiet. I couldn't hear a sound. It was almost dark when it happened, and there was no window in the room, and what light there was under the crack beneath the door disappeared. I tried to find a crack to look out –'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

He was leaning forward in his chair. His hands were clasped tight in front of him. He looked intently at Davida.

'I wasn't afraid,' he continued – 'exactly. But I must say I was never so surprised in my life – so nonplussed. And I must say I was angry. For my head kept smarting. It was a filthy hole of a place, and I kept getting madder and madder. I felt sick. And I kept getting worse. I – I threw up – after a while. I couldn't see a thing – not a wall. I could feel them, groping. There was not a thing in that room. Not a bed to sit down on. Nothing but the floor. It was cold, draughty, and I could hardly stand up. And I kept shouting to be let out. And not one sound could I hear from outside.'

'Why, Sahib! I never heard of such a thing in my life! Why did you never report this to the police? That village has always had a bad reputation!'

'I know it. It doesn't seem possible. It seems like a nightmare. I must have been there hours. I had to keep walking about, I was so cold. I was convinced I'd get pneumonia. I kept bumping into the wall – I was like a blind man. I was weak with hunger – and anger – and my head ached badly – I was in a terrible state when they came for me . . .

'I heard them coming to open the door. I was ready for them. I had thought what I intended to say to them. I was going to bully them – by my presence – into keeping their hands off me. I thought I could do that! I hadn't a chance! They

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

grabbed me! I did – what I could. They were twenty to one – I judge. They tied my hands behind my back with a turban. They had me beaten into submission in a moment – in a second. They took me out, and across a courtyard – only a few steps, I could swear – and into a room. It was a large room, for a village house – full of men. It had a little – it had a little smoking wick against a pillar in the middle. And the first thing I saw – I realized – half stunned, I was – there – propped up against the pillar – was Jalal – bloody – all covered with blood, so I hardly knew him. You know what they were doing? I think – I ought to tell you, Miss Sahib!

‘Oh, yes! Tell me!’

‘They were setting him up, propping him up, against that pillar – he was senseless – and putting my hat on his head, and kicking it off! And when he fell over, limp, on to the floor, they would prop him up again, laughing – and play with the hat, more. I – I never saw anything like that before. I – I –’

‘Oh Sahib! This is awful!’

‘I know it. I – know it is. I must tell you the rest, I think!’

‘Go on! Have you written Emma about this?’

‘No. I tried – I tried – but I couldn’t. I –’

‘I’m glad!’

‘When they saw me being brought in, they began yelling. They wanted me killed. “Kill him quick!” they kept saying. My hands were tied. They put me down by that pillar. I tried to see if Jalal was dead, but I couldn’t. They began playing with me.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

They put my hat on my head, and kicked it off. They – they kicked me. They – spat on me, Miss Sahib.'

'Oh, I can't stand this, Sahib. This is like – the crucifixion. Why haven't you had them punished?'

'It's not – like the crucifixion!' Ramsey was shocked by her words. 'Wait till you hear the rest!'

'Go on!'

'I wasn't – deserted of God. It wasn't like – that.' It had been sickening to him – this recitation. But now a calmness came over his face.

'I want to tell you – I *have* to – *exactly* what happened. I don't want to exaggerate. I had no hope then at all of getting away alone, of course. They were discussing – how to dispose of my body. I wasn't afraid, then. A sort of peace came to me. I didn't look at them. I kept my eyes shut. I didn't heed them. I was praying for Emma. I was thinking of the children. I gave them into God's care. I kept thinking of John as a baby.'

Tears came rushing into Davida's eyes.

'You can't let this outrage go unpunished!'

'Strange I didn't think of the other children so much. But of Emma with that baby. He was – such a funny little kissing baby! I can't tell you – what – a sort of joy came to me! It was like Paul being lifted into the seventh heaven!' he said, humbly.

It wasn't a woman and a baby that Paul saw in the seventh heaven, thought Davida swiftly.

'What happened then?'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'I don't know. I think — they sandbagged me, or something. They hit me — from behind with something. I lost consciousness.'

'This makes me simply sick!'

'The rest is worse. You haven't heard — the worst part.'

'Haven't I? Go on.'

'When I came to, some one was taking care of me. They were rubbing me, and they were putting hot milk into my mouth. The air was simply vile. It was so thick I couldn't breathe. Of course there wasn't a door open. I heard Jalal saying if they wanted me to live they must get me some air. After a while I saw him, sitting there, his hands still tied, against that pillar. Ghastly, he was, bloody still. They opened the door, and lifted my bed towards it. I was on a bed by this time and wrapped up in a lot of filthy quilts. I began to look about.

'There was a man who was taking care of me. He was — sort of — bossing the room, defying it. He kept pushing the villagers back from my bed — they kept crowding round. He made them get back, and he began apologizing for not having any whisky for me. He kept trying to get me to say I wasn't hurt. He was scared, and he kept apologizing and threatening the men crowding about, and cursing them. I saw he wasn't a common villager. He was a man of some position and education. He was used to foreigners. I thought maybe a native army officer home on furlough, or some official. He made them wash Jalal up. He cursed them till they did.'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'He was a plausible rascal, I see now. I thought maybe he was a landowner, and worrying about the fine which was sure to be imposed on the village when the police heard what had happened to me. He said he could never apologize sufficiently for the villainy of my assailants. He talked that way. He began begging forgiveness. He said, "You know better than I do how serious this is going to be for these ignorant fools. It will take them twenty years to pay off the fine they'll get for this, if the Government finds out how they have treated you. We are remote from cities, and a white man doesn't come here once a year. They had a great quarrel about some woman, and they thought her husband had got an English police officer out after them — that's all they know of Police Sahibs! — and they lost their heads, and — struck you. I happened to come home — I was aghast when I heard what had happened — a white Sahib killed in the village! — and I rushed over here — I saw you weren't really dead. I saw who you were. I revived you. I explained to them what a missionary was." You know — think of it, Miss Sahib — he accused me of not having — preached there — of not making myself known in the village. "You pass this village by, going to the low-castes," he said. "You haven't taught these men about Jesus!" The nerve of the man! As if it was *my* fault they didn't know me! "They were determined to kill you," he said, "so as to cover the indignity they had offered you. I explained to them that you wouldn't report it. I myself was educated in a

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

mission school," he said. You know that man even had the presence of mind to mention Morrison – he mentioned some one dead years! – "I told them how your Jesus preached forgiveness," he said. "They wouldn't believe me." He asked me right out, "Is it true or not that your God was attacked, He was spit upon and killed, and dying He forgave His enemies, because they knew not what they did?" He waited till I said it was true. I had to say it was true – and they pushed around the bed, glaring. He said he had persuaded them not to kill me because I would forgive their evil doings. "You promise quickly," he whispered to me, "for I may not be able to manage them."

'I won't forget that man till my dying day! I thought he was truly my rescuer. They kept pushing against the bed – they had closed the door again, and I was getting sick – of course, it may have been only the circumstances – my imagination – but I don't remember ever seeing such an evil-looking lot of natives before in my life.

'But I wouldn't promise anything at first. I sat up finally. I said they were to let me go immediately. I tried to act the Sahib again.

'But it was no good. They stood ready to spring on me. They wouldn't let me go. It looked as though they might do us both in yet – that man as well. I couldn't be sure he could hold them back.

'Jalal was sitting there. He was a sight. He was moaning, crying with pain, and he had crawled – wriggled to my feet and tried to take hold of them;

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

his hands were bound still and he began — just praying to me, Miss Sahib; he could hardly speak plainly. He wanted me to promise, anything. "Get me out of this," he kept saying. "Save my life. Think of my children, Sahib," he said. "I have six. You have only four. You have a pension, and money, and life insurance. And a wife who is as good a manager as you are. Your wife you can trust to bring up your children, who are already half-grown. But what can a woman do alone in this country? Who'll feed my little girls?" he kept crying. He was sobbing or groaning. He had been far worse hurt than I had; I could see that, even then. I think he would have kissed my feet if I hadn't prevented him. He wouldn't let go of them. "Promise them! Save me, Sahib!" He kept saying that.

'And that rogue of a rescuer saw his chance and began pleading for the children of those — brutes. "What will happen to their children, Sahib, if they all get into jail for this?" he said. He knew missionaries. And all the time he kept threatening those men with what would happen if they didn't let us go, and pushing them back from me. He explained that I was an American. I told him that. "If you must kill a white man, kill an Englishman. This man's king will ask the English king who killed his American man. And the English king will have to hang some one to satisfy him, and ten to one it will be guilty murderers." They kept growling back at him like animals.

'I saw we weren't out of it by any means. And I

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

had to think of the children then, because, of course, my life insurance isn't much. John's medical course, and the others. And that man kept telling them how Jesus had forgiven His enemies. And there was poor Jalal squeezing my feet. I was sick at my stomach. So I said I would forgive the wrongs done me: it wasn't a very forgiving spirit. I wanted to get out of it. I acknowledge that. I — I had lost that — peace of God. And I realized at the time that the Government would never forgive me, if it found out, for not reporting such indignities to a — Sahib. Still . . .'

'But what's the worst, then?' Davida demanded. 'They let you go! They didn't really kill you!'

It seemed to be getting more and more difficult for him to go on.

'Do you know how he persuaded them to let us go, finally? He told them the body of a white man murdered wouldn't sink in the river, no matter what they did to it, until the murderers were punished. He simply terrified them into discussing how they could get us back home alive. Finally they agreed to send a messenger to have the trap brought from the Flowery Basti, for as soon as Jalal tried to stand up he fainted. He couldn't walk a step. They carried him on a bed two miles, in the wrong direction, and he groaned and cried every step of the way. They offered to carry me on a bed. But I walked. I felt all right when I got out into the air. It wasn't light yet, when we started, of course.'

'I never heard anything like it in my life! I

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

couldn't have believed it if anyone else had told me . . . What's the matter now?'

'I know it. But it's true. I went through it. And yet you were angry with me for worrying about you – for getting the police out after you!'

'No, I wasn't, really.'

'Yes, you were. I saw it as soon as I came in this evening. I haven't got over the shock of that night. It – I dream of it – it wasn't so much the fear of – dying, I think truly – as the horror of their – that cruelty – that depravity – it was the way they laughed when they spat on me. I didn't realize – before that night – that men – human beings – could do that – I dream of it every night. And when they came and told me you hadn't come home – Davida – I can't tell you what I have suffered to-day – maybe it was foolish of me –'

'Oh, Sahib dear, I'm so sorry!'

'Of course, I *knew* you – *might* be – in some safe place, but the thought of anything else – I kept saying to myself it was foolish, but I had to start out *myself* in that direction to make sure you hadn't passed *that* way. And then I found you had. They swore they had seen you going towards that place, and you had threatened to investigate that – story of Miss Bhose's about kidnappers –'

'But you didn't – realize they *WERE* kidnappers?'

'No; I tell you the truth. It never occurred to me – and then when they said you had gone to Pir Khanwala, I went to consult Jalal, and his wife and all the villagers had been trying to find out what

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

happened to him, and they had the idea they were involved – all that village – in something. Well, when they began saying that – Davida – I guess I lost my head altogether –’

‘No wonder!’

‘I was nearly beside myself. I felt you there among them all the afternoon. I tried to be calm, and I tried to keep my head – I kept the men – in perfect order – as we got near the village. I am proud of them when I think of it now, after it’s over. Not one of them spoke a word – nor started anything. There were fifty of us –’

‘Fifty policemen!’

‘No. Christians – of the Flowery Basti. I took them first. I tried to do it without – telling the police. And when we got there it was about three – we came up to that village – and you never saw a more peaceful, innocent place. The old men were smoking in the sun, and women were sitting spinning in all the courtyard doors – and when we descended upon them, the farmers came hurrying from the fields to see what was up. I waited for the head-man, and he came running out. He wasn’t the man I had seen. I told him – you were – missing – and I had come to make inquiries. And he was sorry and – seemed eager to do all he could – and when I insisted on looking about – he said yes, of course, go any place, into any house; and he went with me wherever I went, to help me, as if I was – out of my mind, explaining to the women and everybody – that you were lost, and I thought you were there

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

somewhere. I caught sight of two men I thought I recognized. But they never turned a hair. They all sort of – pitied my – delusion and you never in your life saw a more innocent-looking place. And with him and Jalal I went around to the side street we had come in by that evening, and I picked out the very house we were in. In that courtyard two babies were tugging away at a rope with a black kid at the end of it. And I felt like a fool. And they offered to send out men everywhere to look for you – I didn't know what to do. I felt like a fool, and realized maybe you had turned up at home by this time. So I took the head-man aside and told him I had heard rumours about his village, and what a serious matter it was to detain – or anything – an American lady, and he protested he would give his life if one hair of your head was ever hurt if you ever came there. So then – we just went back. And in the Flowery Basti I questioned every one about the rumour – tried to find out why they thought the men were kidnappers, but it was only – hearsay. I couldn't get anything definite. Every one was afraid to tell. And I went back to the place where they had said they had seen you going there. And I pinned that evidence down to one old man – and he said his eyesight wasn't good, and maybe it was only a man carrying a load of hay that he had seen from a distance in the twilight.

'And when I got home, still there was no news of you. I couldn't rest. I couldn't – eat. I came over here to examine Miss Bhowse. She was crying. She said the only person that knew anything definite was

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

that woman of yours – the Dying Sister, they call her – and she wouldn't tell. At least, she never would tell before, but maybe now that you were involved . . . And – we planned it. We called her in – she looked scared when she saw me – and Miss Bhose said to her suddenly, without any explanation – she said –

“The kidnappers of Pir Khanwala have got the Miss Sahib. Tell the Sahib how to find her. What house is she in?” And she fell into the trap. She shrieked, and said, “Oh,” – she frightened me – “the lane near the weavers' quarter,” she said. “By the banyan tree?” I asked her. And she said yes. “Where the tree straddles the lane. The third door from the turning towards the lane,” she said. That was the house I was in, Davida. She said they sent them across the border from there when I asked her. And at that – I went over to the police officer's – It was four o'clock –

‘Well, I'm glad you did. I mean – after all, they nearly killed you – and Jalal!’

‘In vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird, it says. But I walked right into his trap’ – he spoke bitterly – ‘as the woman walked into mine! I haven't told you the worst, Miss Sahib.’

‘You haven't? Go on, then.’

But he sat there wretchedly, looking at the fire.

‘It doesn't seem possible that I could have made such a fool of myself! I can honestly say I did what seemed best to me at the time. But now I see it ought not to have seemed best. I – just did it – to save my skin, I see now.’

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'Well, that's a pretty good reason for doing anything! Tell me what it is, Sahib.'

'It was for you I did it, in one way! For you I have – dishonoured my faith. Not that I regret it,' he added as she protested. 'I told the Mission not to leave you here alone. I have done – what I could. I dare say I have – boasted of my – superiority many times –'

Davida, not knowing what to say, said nothing.

'You wouldn't believe a man could be such a fool! There, that night – in the end – that man persuaded them to let us go – if I would *swear* not to reveal what had happened. And will you believe it, Miss Sahib? I *wouldn't* swear! I stood up there and I PREACHED at them! I boasted to them! I said I would *promise* and my word was as good as any oath, and a lot better than any of their oaths. I said – only liars needed oaths. "Let your word be yea, yea, and nay, nay," I quoted at them. A Sahib's word, I said – a white man's – I said I would not swear on their Koran to save my life!'

Davida, stirred as she was by his emotion, could scarcely repress her smile. He thought it an incredible story, did he? It sounded just like him.

'The man tried to get me to swear. Nothing else would content them, he said. He got a Testament out of Jalal's pocket and tried to make me swear by that. And I wouldn't. I just stood there and quoted at them and said – they could accept my word of honour – or kill me! Would you believe that I could have done that?'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

He was so sick at heart that she couldn't smile.

'Jalal tried to get me to swear. I wouldn't. I convinced them! That was all the satisfaction I got out of that! Finally I convinced them. They let me go. If I say I won't tell, your secret is safer with me living than with one of you dead. I said *that*, Davida! Would you believe it? And that – man – he said it, too. And they believed it. And when those two men saw me there to-day – they weren't afraid – they hadn't tried to escape – they believed it.'

'And then what?'

'Davida, I went to the Police Sahib – because of what that woman of yours said – I mean – you said you were going to investigate – Taj's disappearance – I remembered how they laughed when they spat on me. And we couldn't get any trace of you. I told him I thought – maybe you were in that village. He's been working on the whole case for weeks – for months – gathering his evidence – just waiting for some one to identify that leader. And he – led me on – cunning – he was. Pretended not to be willing to do anything till I told him – about that night. Davida – I was so afraid for you – my daughter – almost – the idea of you there – was – I lost all my nerve. He wouldn't help till I told him. And then – we started off . . .

'There those men were, Davida! They didn't believe I would – betray them. They hadn't tried to escape. We walked in – and seized them – out of their houses – they were eating their supper – and

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

women crying and screaming – howling like death. I identified four of them. And he took the men – whose house I was in. I didn't remember them, strange to say. And to-morrow they will have – that man, my rescuer. He – has head-quarters in Lahore. He's* the brains of it all. I'll – stand up – and identify him. I'll have to do that. No one else – dares. Dozens of people – in the Flowery Basti, and all these villages – must have known about this. I suspect – that Jalal did, or has for some time now. But they are afraid. We hadn't left the village – right in the midst of the shrieking and – excitement, when they came from Bhagwan, telling us – you had been there. At first – they thought they were being arrested because of you and they could go on protesting their innocence. And then – they knew. They realized that it was all up with them. The Policewala told them. "The preacher of Jesus lied to us," they cried out. "He betrayed us." I stood in the shadow – out of the firelight – Davida, I felt –'

'Oh, Sahib! Why should you care so? You didn't mean to screen such – wickedness – when you promised. You didn't tell a lie. You did your duty. It was your duty – to expose such – villains.'

'Yes. If I hadn't stood boasting and preaching – it wouldn't have mattered so, of course.'

'That's why the Policewala was so – feeling so set up.'

'He thinks he's magnanimous, too, not to – complain – about me keeping it dark so long. He

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

says it's going to be the biggest rounding-up – of criminals – I suppose he thinks he can redeem himself by this – stunt! What'll happen now, I can't imagine. Can't you see every vernacular paper writing up how I refused to swear, like a common man? If it had been any other Sahib, I shouldn't have minded so much!

'I'm so sorry! You know I did send the syce home to tell you. It's his fault, really. I'm going to fire him, if he is Miss Monroe's servant. I can't stand him any longer. If she wants to take him back when she gets here, that's another matter. He's going to be called to account for this! I never dreamed it would make you so much trouble. I didn't intend staying there the night. I saw there was no hope of her living unless something was done. I knew they might blame me for her death if she died on the way. Oh, Sahib, it wasn't any joy-lark for me! I hadn't any watch. No one knew what time it was. We got to the station at four this morning, two hours early – we couldn't even get the waiting-room opened for us for more than an hour. I walked nearly every step of that nine miles, watching her every minute, for fear she stopped moaning – she was too weak to shriek any longer – I never thought she would live to get there – and – I never dreamed the syce wouldn't get home before you would be up this morning –'

'I'm not blaming you, Davida. You did what – seemed best to you. But, of course, since that night – I shall never be easy if you're an hour late – I don't think anything – any life-saving even, can justify you

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

— in staying in a village at night — alone. I mean — you will just have to promise me now — for until I forget how those men laughed . . .’

And Davida said, in the stillness:

‘It so often seems as if nothing more COULD happen to us, doesn’t it? And yet — things just go on — happening —’

‘They’ll go on happening now, that’s sure! It’s late. I must go. Let’s have a prayer first —’

It was his second nature — prayer — or perhaps his first. Poignant words came rushing out from the depth of him. ‘Oh, merciful God. Oh, Eternal Father, have mercy upon us. Forgive us our sins. Forgive me, the most grievous sinner! I have boasted that I am not as they are — a common liar. Cleanse me of sinful pride for the sake of the Holy Name upon us. I have made a great fool of myself, a servant of Thine. Turn not Thy Face away from me, my Father!’

But Davida said, ‘Oh, Lord, more of our pillows have become little trousers and we have no place to lay our heads. May the poor garments, the rags of our righteousness, be acceptable for the sake of Thy lowly servant, the naked Jesus.’

CHAPTER VII

It was Davida's way to live not perhaps by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, but certainly by the phrases of her imagination. All that night in her troubled, over-weary sleep the refrain of the pillows and the trousers sang itself in her mind, and she thought drowsily that though she had meant only to save Miriam's life and her baby's, yet really she had saved many women from those wretches. That was enough for her. But John Ramsey, she mused, trying to sleep — he wasn't satisfied unless his pillows really remained pillows. A foolish little warm shirt for some one's nakedness didn't console him. He wouldn't have regretted breaking his promise to save her. But to have done it to no end — it's only the scrupulous like the Sahib that really know tragedy, she thought. He'll be praying in agony all the night. But I don't care who thinks I'm a liar, or a fraud of a virgin. That's why I'm sleeping so soundly. Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not, she thought, turning about.

She rose in the morning to receive embassies all the day — one little delegation after another coming from the village Christians to congratulate her on her escape, and to reassure themselves that she was indeed there. Ah! how we wept and prayed for you, they said. How we rejoice now to hear that those evil, vile assailants of yours are already lodged in the jail, where may they perish! She said over and

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

over to them patiently that she had never been kidnapped – not for a second, and they cried out that thank God, they knew she hadn't, and it was a very good thing that her kidnappers were in jail, and they hoped they would all stay there till they rotted. And they said they knew it was the Sahib that had been stolen and ill-treated, and many women besides, but the men would get longer sentences, more severe punishments for having dared to touch her, the Miss Sahib. To think that she had escaped without a bruise, without a black and blue mark even! Was she not wounded anywhere? they asked, and she prayed for patience and repeated that she had never been within ten miles of violence. They understood that, they said, but they were glad her assailants were in jail.

Once after breakfast she turned from these rejoicing Christians to a group of Moslem women who had halted uncertainly a little distance from the veranda. Encouraged by her gestures, they came nearer, salaaming deeply, hesitating, unused to the ways of foreigners.

'Peace be unto you,' they ventured.

'And unto you be peace,' she replied.

So then they gathered, reassured, about her. There was a very old tottering man among them and, bowing as low as his age permitted, he began their supplications:

'Oh, Government! Oh, Dominion! Have mercy upon us! Have mercy upon us, sir! Give us help, oh, Lord!' He was one of those proper old farmers who

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

addressed her in the masculine, to demonstrate, as it were, that he was magnanimously blind to her feminine inferiority. There was an old woman among them, perhaps the man's wife. She came close to Davida, bending down, and took hold of her feet.

'Oh, Government! Oh, Sahib! Save me my little boy!'

Davida looked to see which of the babies they carried was ill, motioning to them to sit down on the rush mats she kept for visitors unused to chairs. She seated herself, and they made a circle about her, sitting on their haunches, looking from one to the other. They were women of the class that sometimes works in the fields. They had red hand-spun veils of thin cotton 'tied and dyed' all over into intricate patterns of brown and yellow. They had great heavy silver ear-rings three inches in diameter, pulling out of shape the lobes of their ears. They had sturdy trouser-garments of hand-spun heavy bright blue cotton with red silk stripes. And they put up their hands to Davida in prayer like angels in pictures, letting the old woman speak for them all.

'It is not for the baby, but for the baby's father we have come - my grandson, oh, Lord. Compassion becomes the mighty. Give us our son back.'

'Where have you come from?' Davida asked. She sighed at their answer. It was the kidnapping village they had named.

'You shouldn't have come to me,' she said.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

The old woman had forgotten her fear of foreigners – the dangers she might be in. She had clasped Davida's knees in a very passion of imploring. 'Give him back to us, Government,' she kept praying. Davida looked at her. She was one of those inexplicable creatures not rare in those parts – a woman who didn't know her own age, who in her life had probably seen no woman who could read, who had seen few men even able to write their names, who had lived some sixty, perhaps seventy years, scarcely travelling farther than the four or five miles from her father's house to her husband's, years of black ignorance, of hungry poverty and of hard labour, and out of that she had some way achieved, miraculously, Davida thought, beauty, exquisite beauty – which was shining out of the wisdom and gentleness of her wrinkled old face. Fear and mother-love had armed her for the terrifying adventure of seeking out this white woman, for making this journey now, in her old age, into the unknown for this child's sake.

'Mother,' Davida said, 'I share your sorrow. But I can do nothing for you. I can't help you.'

The old man then, and the old woman, and the three younger ones, all began pleading together. A strong middle-aged woman took her turn as intercessor.

'Sahib!' she cried. 'Look at that old man! Is he not old? Surely God's servants are merciful to the aged. This will kill our father! To have his son in jail! Will you look at these babies?' She pointed

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

persuasively at the nursing children half hidden under the other two red veils. 'Should young children starve?'

'I am sorry you are in trouble. I can do nothing.'
But she drew herself nearer.

'We are poor folk. We have so little to offer you. We give you what we possess. We offer you our jewels,' they said.

Davida tried to get up. The old one was clasping her feet tightly.

'I don't want your jewellery. You can't offer me bribes. You listen to me. I say I haven't anything to do with this affair. I am *not* the Government. I have no connection with it. I am not English even!'

How could they believe her?

'You're a white woman. We see your beautiful skin coloured like milk,' they implored. 'Beautiful to men, such skin!'

'I'm white, but I'm not English. All whites are not. I'm American. I'm *Americaine*!'

But they had never heard the word.

'Is there, then, another foreign country? Are there two of them – two foreign countries?' they asked, dazed.

'There are many! Germany – have you not heard that word? – many others –' Davida said. 'I am not English. I have nothing to do with these Government affairs!'

'But what does country matter so long as the skin is white. You have power with men. It was cer-

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

tainly you who put our innocent and white-hearted little boy in the jail!' Could she deny that?

She denied it, hotly, futilely.

They consulted together.

'Where is the Sahib?' they asked. They looked towards the house.

'What Sahib? I live alone here with my women.'

'The Police Sahib. Is he not here?'

'He is *not*! He lives over there!' She pointed down the road. They looked in the direction she pointed. But the old one turned to her, wheedlingly:

'When he comes next into your gate, you white pearl of beauty, when he comes to you, remember me. Say to him, save Ali Khan for me, for his old mother's sake. No man could refuse you, you soft sweet flower!'

Anger couldn't persuade them. Gentleness couldn't convince them. 'I'm not a servant of the English,' she said. 'I have no salary from the Government. I am of those who follow the Prophet Jesus. I have little schools for girls who want to learn for the sake of Jesus. I have no part in the Government.'

'Jesus?' Well, if that was what would please her.

'We, too, follow Jesus. We say the creed of that worthy Prophet. There is no God but God, and Jesus is the spirit of God,' they chanted, in Arabic. 'Get our boy out of jail for us!'

She said a great wrong had been done women. Great evils must be punished.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'We agree!' they cried. 'May all wrong-doers be punished!' And the grandmother argued: 'But my boy's mother died when he was born, my little young daughter. I raised him with my own hands, all blue and shivering and as much as one could hold in an open palm. Both my son and my grandson, that lad is. And spotless. And loving. And hard-working. And the Government's least law is written on his heart. A handsome strong man who could do no wrong. Have you no sons? Where are your little sahibs? You pity me, a double mother!'

She said she had no children. They clucked out syllables of pity. 'May God give you ten sons!' they prayed for her. She said she wasn't married. They hesitated, not knowing how to meet so strange a situation. 'The white are always young,' they said. 'You have but to choose among the sahibs.' And on they went . . .

At the Police Sahib's veranda what bold ignoramus dared to linger after being dismissed? An importunate Indian who tried it would be kicked out, or beaten with the servants' summary sticks. But the First Lady – if through some grievous necessity she sent any Indian away uncomforted, unbled, she prayed Jesus wretchedly to forgive her, to follow him with the eternal comfort, to send light from on high into his heart. No haste was pardonable, no lack of love tolerable in those who carried that name to people who did not worship it. Davida was patient. She was gentle. She was standing up trying to get rid of them, to unclasp the old hands from her

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

ankles, when the next party of besetters marched in through the gate.

'Peace be upon you, now, my sisters,' she said to them. They began at once. They had risen early. They had come far, walking relentlessly. They were shifting their babies from one hip to another. They sat down, out of breath, to compose themselves. Their spokesman was vaguely familiar.

'Am I not your friend, your old acquaintance?' she began. 'How often have I seen you passing down the street to the Basti when I was at my father's house for a visit. And I said to these my afflicted neighbours, "Have no fear!" I said. "I will bring you to her. *She* will listen. She humbles herself always to bless the poor. She eats with outcastes and sweepers. Stop your tears," I said to them, "and put on decent clothes, as for a wedding, and I will take you to her."' She was out for a lark, that one, greatly enjoying her own importance. She turned triumphantly to her party. 'Look!' she cried – she pointed dramatically to the bunch of household keys which Davida had in her hand. 'The very keys of the dungeons she has ready in her hands,' she proclaimed.

The face of the first old mother lighted up again.

'Ah, the keys!' they cried. 'She was but trying our patience!'

And all those faces, earnest to desperation, were beaming and hoping again before Davida could open her mouth to explain.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

She named her keys one by one. This opens the cupboard where the children's primers and pencils are kept. (She even reads herself, the spokesman explained.) This one opens the larder store-room. (Rich; she must have great mountains of sugar piled up!) This opens the woodshed. (She has dozens of servants to cook her feasts.) This opens the writing-desk drawers. (She need call in no letter-writer. She does it herself.) This opens the medicine closet. This, the closet of the horses' fodder. And so on.

But that little one – those others, are they the jail keys? She won't confess it. She says she is not of the Government's country, even. There may be another foreign country. They tell the truth, these white folk. We must be patient. We must use cunning. But no bribes may be mentioned. She is rich now. She doesn't need them. Divert her mind to renew the attack. Why isn't her nose pierced, now? How is it that, having wealth beyond estimation; she has no gold bracelets? Does she not intend to marry? And then spring the prayer suddenly at her. Government, let our son go! Let him go free! See, this woman, she is my sister-in-law's cousin's stepdaughter, and her husband, that strong, innocent, worthy young man, has been accused of great crime, that upright soul who rises at dawn to pray and often at midnight says an extra prayer for luck. Never in his life has he been so hard-hearted as to kick a dung-heap dog. Ask the Sahib to let him out. For his mother is old, and his father is blind, and his wife

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

expects another baby, and his brother has broken his leg, and his father-in-law has lost his mind, and his aunt has great bulging goitre, and his roof has fallen in during the recent rains, and he has lately hired a new large field, and he never, never in his life . . .

Just then John Ramsey and the Police Sahib turned in at the gate, a hundred yards perhaps from the veranda. One woman spied them. She gave the alarm. 'There they are – her Sahibs – her friends –' The veranda emptied. Before the men were ten feet nearer, Davida was sitting alone, protesting.

She was rather bored. She didn't relish having all these women see the Police Sahib calling on her. But it was unusually civil of him to call. He might have summoned her to his office. It was, of course, to his purpose to be affable. Standing there, tall, English, red-faced, and smart-looking in his riding clothes, he hoped they weren't interrupting her. He wanted to ask about the teacher – the woman who had told Ramsey about being in that village – when would it be convenient for Davida to have her there for him to interview –

'I'll ask her to come in now,' said Davida. Of course, she realized at once, to him that was an absurd way of putting it. She ought to have ordered the woman in. She went to the little room on the veranda. But the sister wasn't there. Neither was she sitting anywhere about in the sun. Neither did she answer when Davida called. 'Perhaps she's gone over to Miss Bhose,' Davida thought, and went to-

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

wards her dressing-room to get her sun hat. The dressing-room door was locked.

Davida was annoyed. That dressing-room was her ultimate sanctuary. Like most bedrooms designed to exclude heat, hers had too many doors for privacy. There had had to be the little dressing place built adjoining it. She cherished that corner of hers. She allowed no one in it. She allowed no one but the cook to knock on the door of it, and he knew better than to disturb her there except for an emergency. And now . . .

'Who's in there?' she called shortly. 'Open this door at once!' And she rattled the door-knob.

And then the door opened — a little crack — and the Sister peeped out carefully. Seeing it was indeed Davida, she opened it enough for Davida to push through.

'Why did you lock that door?' she asked. She asked it kindly and she knew the answer from that dark face. Never since the day she had come had the Sister ever done anything to annoy Davida. She had simply sat where she was put, glancing apprehensively about her. And the expression of her face, always a pain to Davida, had one day so stirred her compassion that she had asked her, laying down the book she was reading about the Joy of the Saints —

'Tell me, Sister, when were you the happiest you have ever been in your life?'

And without a moment's pause the face had gleamed as the words of her answer came:

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'Oh, *one* day I was happy! The day the Miss Sahib took me away from that place!'

And now that face —

'What's the trouble?' Davida spoke as she would have spoken to a frightened baby.

'Miss Sahib, who are those women? What do they want here? Make them go away from the compound, Miss Sahib. They are waiting under the fig trees!'

'Oh, Sister, they are in trouble. They came to me. They can't hurt anything. What's the matter?'

'Why have those Sahibs come here? Why have two Sahibs come here? You won't let them have me, Miss Sahib.'

'Oh, Sister! That's the Padre Sahib. You know him. Such a nice Sahib. He wouldn't hurt anyone. He wants to speak to you —'

'No. I won't speak to him. I can't understand what he says. I've got a pain in my head.' And she closed the door behind Davida and would have pushed the bolt to lock it.

Davida took hold of her arm.

'Now, my sister, you mustn't fuss — and worry. Nothing can possibly hurt you here. I came just to ask you a favour. You would do something for me, wouldn't you? You come with me and tell the Sahib — what you said to him yesterday. You want to help us — don't you?'

'No. I don't want to help. I didn't see the Sahib yesterday. I didn't talk to him at all. I don't know him. I'm an ignorant woman, and my head whirls round and round, and my chest has a pain.'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'Now, Sister, that isn't — strictly true. You come out with me just for a minute or two — don't you want those bad men put in jail?'

'No. I won't come. I don't know how to talk —'

But Davida took her more firmly by the arm and was propelling her the few steps across the bedroom into the living-room door. But she couldn't get her across the room. At the sight of the men, she collapsed stubbornly on the floor. Davida sat down on a stool beside her, encouraging her patiently.

'Now ask her quick,' she said to the Englishman — 'what you want to know.'

'Tell me what you said yesterday to the Padre Sahib,' he said in very fair Urdu.

But the Sister, with her veil pulled down to her chin, sat huddled, trembling, against Davida, with her back towards the men, imploring Davida to save her.

'Let me go! What do they want? I can't understand foreign languages. I can't understand Sahibs. Don't let them have me!' The men spoke softly. Then they tried sternness. Davida coaxed and consoled and commanded. But the Sister didn't know where she had been born. She didn't know where she had lived. She had never heard of kidnappers. She had never spoken to Ramsey Sahib. She had never told Miss Bhose anything. 'Let me go,' she prayed. She lifted her veil to peep at Davida. When Davida saw her haunted eyes and the sweat running down her forehead —

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'Let her go,' she said to the men. 'We won't get anything out of her now. We're only torturing her. I can't stand it.' And she let her slip out, and heard the bolt of the dressing-room door jammed into its place behind her.

Ramsey was annoyed.

'It's an absolute lie, as Miss Bhose will tell you. It was only on the strength of what she said yesterday — Miss Bhose heard it all — that I appealed to you. It's her fault, in a way.'

'But they all behave like that when I get hold of them. It's the way they all lie. I'm used to it. I'll send a man for her and we'll get it out of her.' The Police Sahib was quite unmoved.

'You'll send a man for her?'

'A policeman.'

'What for?'

'We have our ways of managing. We're used to this. We'll take her down there —'

'But you can't take that woman. She's ill. She's half-witted!'

'They all are, when you try to get anything out of them.'

'But look here! She's half dead. I won't have her — questioned.'

John Ramsey cleared his throat and moved in his chair — to remind Davida that she was talking to His Majesty's Superintendent of Police.

'She's been entrusted to me, and I don't think — she is physically fit for any — excitement,' she explained, sturdily.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

The Police Sahib merely inquired who had entrusted her to Davida.

She told the woman's story. He sat looking at her in increasing surprise. He asked her incredulously to be more definite. Where did she say the woman had come from? She called a spade a horrid dirty spade.

'Do you mean to say' – he looked disgustedly at Ramsey – 'that you've got a common bazaar woman – trash – living here with you – in this house – full of – disease? It oughtn't to be allowed!'

He couldn't endure women like Davida. A waste of good flesh, he called them. And he didn't like Davida particularly, because she had always been rude to him he said since the first time he had met her, at dinner at the doctor's house. On that occasion he had asked her why she stayed in India. He said he had always heard that anybody could get a job in the United States. She treasured that question against him and added it to her other grievances. The chief of them was that the doctor's wife had urged her to get busy and marry him. You may never have another chance if you stay in a hole like this, she had said. Davida had never got over the insult of that suggestion. 'Me, Davida Baillie, and a creature like that!' she would still think, angrily. 'That's the worst of these English! They never have any real idea of the KIND of American you are!'

So now she glared back at him as he sat eyeing her hostilely. A nice one he is, Davida thought.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

Now that he and his sort had got through with her, she wasn't fit to touch, wasn't she? It oughtn't to be allowed, oughtn't it? Oh, how she sometimes hated men! And when she spoke, her voice was so sweet and innocent that Ramsey rose uncomfortably to separate them.

'Of course, it's my business to take care of trash – when other people have finished with them. The scum and all the refuse. Pick up the pieces that nothing may be lost, our Lord said. It's the church of the divine fragments we serve, out –'

The Police Sahib rose hastily. Just as Davida thought, he wasn't going to sit there and be preached at by that American old maid.

After he had gone, Ramsey said :

'Really, you mustn't annoy him, Miss Sahib. We can't – in our position – in my position. He can make it very – unpleasant for me – if he wants to. You know how they look at – not reporting such things at once. The woman ought to be made to tell the truth. She's lying up and down. You can't interfere with an official.'

'I can try. I'm not going to let them have her. I'll – be very nice about it. But I won't let him have her.'

'He was telling me just now – they have – arrested the son-in-law of Dr. Ram Chunder – that master, you know – of the Ayra Somaj school –'

'Goodness! Men of that class!'

'I don't know whether he had anything to do with it or not. He says it's a regular underground rail-

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

way affair, passing women on from the cities to the villages across the border. You know what that means. If ten men are guilty, a hundred will be accused. They'll have to "cough up" to get free. Every village in the district will be discussing my part in it.'

'It'll be bad.'

'I hope you realize it. We can't afford to — offend him. I've played right into his hands. He's got me.'

Naturally they were both heavy-hearted. They knew their village world. Lawsuits sufficed it. Being illiterate, it had no books. It had no newspapers. It had nothing like football, baseball, tennis, golf. It had no theatres. It had no movies. It had no wireless. The proceedings of the court-room took the place of all these. That world had the fury of its climate to endure, the barrenness of its soil to subsist upon, the passion of its religion to quarrel about, the interest of sex to exhaust. For diversion, for relief from the bitter monotony of existence, it turned to the processes of justice. As people of other worlds, differently situated, for the satisfaction of their creative instincts, pour forth and consume terrible floods and seas of printed fiction, the Indians about Aiyanianwala pour forth these floods of imaginative tales about one another under oath in the witness-stand. This method has its disadvantages, but at least it turns no forests into paper pulp. It has, too, its advantages. It enables almost any man to make a fat living practising law. It gives the towns whole

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

new streets of expensive houses built by attorneys. It brings the best wells, the choicest gardens, the richest fields, into the possession of men who ought to be able to hold them against all claimants. And for the victims it is at least the escape from reality to romance.

Here, now, was this affair of the Sahib and the kidnappers. The bored thousands of those not poignantly involved in it turned to it as to some colossal melodrama rising spontaneously out of their essential being. It stirred them to their depth. It set their wits working again gloriously. Such a delicious complication – a situation worthy of such fine artistry, who had seen? – the rich and the poor, Hindus, Moslems, Christians, low-castes, Indians, English and Americans, literate and illiterate, male and female, stealers and stolen, all thrown into one peppery curry!

You gloated. You set to work. Seizing the opportunity, you began with the right hand to build up subtle subterfuges, while with the left you tore down hostile defences. You undermined devious plots with one corner of your mouth, while with the other you mined sly counter-plots. If a man of your village was implicated in this affair, you began by the historical method. You recalled how his mother-in-law's stepson's nephew, in return for certain favours of perjury from you in the case of his landlord's suit for damages to property, had strengthened your alibi that time seven years ago when you were charged with stealing irrigating waters from the canals of

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

the Hindu barrister's tenant. But if now this neighbour would promise to intercede with a certain maulvie, whose wife was your sister-in-law's niece, on behalf of your nephew who was to bring suit for identification of his disputed ox next month, you might be persuaded on his behalf to approach the low-caste Christian teacher of the Mission School in your village and threaten to beat him and vilify his wife unless he persuaded the missionary Sahib to swear strongly that your neighbour was innocent. On the other hand, here was this ancient enemy of yours who was not yet implicated, but deserved to be. There was that wrong-headed niece of yours who had eloped with the butcher's son and by this time had had more than enough of him. Why should she not, now, if you prevailed upon her wronged husband to take her back, swear that your enemy had seized her and sold her straight into the hands of the kidnappers? Her father, too, in return for the new red heifer calf, might be induced to swear to his identification, to testify that he had himself gone and brought her back from — who, now, would it be who swore he had out of pity redeemed the poor girl from the hands of your enemy? Oh yes. There was that man who was wanting to get new timbers for his roof. Now, timbers your sister's husband's uncle had in plenty. Sitting on your haunches in some courtyard, silently smoking in your turn the water-pipe among your peers, thought by thought you built up your plot, you created your fiction and you surrounded it hour by hour with all the circum-

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

stances of truth until it was truth – until in its perfect form, convinced of your integrity, you published it, not on paper, but in the court-room.

The process was no mystery to Davida. Every instinct of hers understood it. But John Ramsey – he hadn't read a novel in ten years, and had no patience with it. 'Ye shall know the truth,' said John Ramsey, 'and the truth shall make you free' – from injustice – he said – from cruelty. But 'What is truth?' cried the artists. '*God* knows the truth. It's His affair. We are but human.'

'When I think what the police will make out of this in bribes –' he said now, despondently, to Davida.

'We can't help it.' What else could she say?

The importunate widows, alertly watching, saw him going away and came flocking about Davida again, up on to the veranda.

'Did you cajole him for us? Did you beguile him into promising? Will he go now and let our innocent men out?' they asked. As the day wore away her heart went out in compassion to the much-abused unjust judge of the parable who of old avenged the importunate widow lest by her continual coming she bruise him. Day after day these would come, she foresaw, delegation after delegation, from village beyond village, until the trial was over. Finally she appealed to their love of privacy for eating their food.

'You must let me go now and have my tea,' she said.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'What? Eating again? It is but now you had your food!' they exclaimed.

It was six hours ago that she had had breakfast, she answered. Then one of them said, resignedly, Oh, that was the way the rich always did. Whenever they got hungry they just went and ate, time after time, guzzling all the day. Let her go and eat in peace. We will wait then till she comes out again. They sat persistently down.

Davida went to wash her hands for tea. To get to her bath-room – that cement addition on the steps of which her bath-water was heated in the sun most of the year, in an oil tin – to get to that she had to go through her dressing-room. She pushed against the dressing-room door, expecting it to open. But no! It was locked again. She had to stand entreating, begging, coaxing, to get in. The Dying Sister, so weak she could scarcely rise to open the door, began incoherently:

'Why are those women standing about still? Why did the Sahib come back that time after he had gone to the gate? You will never let him have me, will you? It was for you I said it. They said you were being hurt. I can't run fast now. I am too ill. They would grab me by the arm, twisting me. I don't understand the Sahib. I never said a word to anybody. Make those people leave me alone, Miss Sahib.'

Davida took her temperature. When she saw it was a hundred and four – now's the time to send for the doctor, she thought. If he saw her in this state

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

he wouldn't let the Police Sahib have her. She got her to lie down. She drank her tea sitting beside her. She quietened her. She got her to sleep.

So then when Miss Bhose came calling her, she crept out quietly, without awakening her. Miss Bhose had arrived with a tonga-load of women.

'It's the doctor Ram Chunder's mother, his wife, and his daughter-in-law, that nice Viro who passed first in the middle exam. five years ago. They have sat weeping in the school court all the afternoon, imploring me to do something – to bring them to you. The school is gone to pieces. Why is it, they all say, yesterday you were kidnapped, and to-day men like Ram Chunder's son are being arrested by the Sahib for it, when all the day he lay in his own house prostrate with fever? I've explained till I have no breath left. Miss Sahib, they are beside themselves. If you help them now – do you know what they suggest –' Miss Bhose paused, wistfully, hesitating.

'No,' said Davida, coldly.

'That house next door, Miss Sahib –'

They sighed together. The house next to the school was – excepting the Encyclopædia – perhaps the only thing Miss Bhose's generous soul coveted. There was no hope of the school expanding, there had not been for twenty years, except by getting possession of that addition. The owners, rich and mighty, sneering at the educational pretences of females, annoyed by low-caste encroachments, would never even permit the broaching of the possibility of its sale.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'This,' said Davida firmly, 'is a bribe!'

'You come and hear what they say. You hear how they put it,' Miss Bhose retorted.

Five women came in, at Davida's invitation – not women with whom she was intimate, not women who came often out of the city to the Mission house. Davida identified them in her mind. That old one in the soiled white veils and the purple silk ritualistic skirt, those yards of gay bordered cloth which, tied about over ordinary garments, counteracts the defilement of associating with beefeaters, that one was the doctor's mother, and Davida, looking at her, thought that if most Hindu women get old quickly, many of them get old magnificently. The one in the rose-coloured skirt was the doctor's wife. That young one, Davida had known her since she started coming to the school when her first baby teeth were out and her next ones not yet appearing. The one whose face was red with weeping, that was the girl's mother. And this other woman, the only one who had a single gold bracelet, this was an aunt come from Lahore to express her sorrow.

They wouldn't sit on chairs. They sat on the floor, as became mourners. They presented themselves before her without spirit; beggars, they were. The old grandmother, pointing out to the road where the tonga was waiting, explained that Miss Bhose had hired that tonga; she – may the Lord reward her – had paid the man his fare. Smitten as they were by the stroke of God, they cast themselves upon her mercy. Unless the police stopped the persecution of

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

their sensitive, quivering, innocent son, he would go mad. To whom did the hopeless and the suffering, the poor, the outcastes, the beggars come but to the missionary folk? And who was so poor, so pitiable as those who fall into the hands of the native police? Since some evil-doer had thrown a bomb to kill a Sahib in Lahore, their sweet, their lovely son, who had maliciously been charged with conspiracy in that outrage, had been arrested for every crime committed in the city. 'We were rich once,' the mother cried. 'We have forgotten what a full stomach is. Time after time we have bought him out of their clutches.' And the grandmother, pulling back her veil, cried, 'Look now at my empty ears! Where are the hoops of gold that in my youth adorned them? I sold them; I gave them up when he was accused of writing that wicked and seditious pamphlet. Even the necklace that his grandfather gave me in my youth, — the necklace of fine Delhi workmanship, I gave them all, and we had him free and in our home again. Look at his mother's arms!' She uncovered the scrawny arms of that thin weeping woman. 'Have you not seen her arms so heavy with gold bracelets that she lifted them slowly? Where are they now, those bracelets which were her dowry? They went to that lawyer of Lahore; who built a three-story house at the corner of the road which you see as you go into the station from the wide bazaar. See her face — yellow with sorrow — dying of shame! And look at this child, this very daughter of your school! She came to us adorned like the sun, a

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

bride like a silver star. Look at her stripped! Look at these little glass bracelets — three for a penny! Ask her mother what her jewellery cost; new style jewels they were, a twinkling watch for her wrist. She kept nothing. She offered them up for her Lord, as I did, as his mother did, gladly to save his life. We didn't grudge them, so dear he was, our life. But now — look, all our arms are bare. Our ears are bare. Our noses are bare. Our ankles are bare. Our house is gone. Do you know we live now in a small dirty hovel of a place? We have no more to give the police. Have mercy on us, for your God Jesus' sake. The child is your own!

And as the old mother's voice broke into sobbing, Viro took up the task — Viro, a harassed and driven wife, who a few years before had been a giggling, irresistible, round-faced, naughty little pest of a pupil. She spoke wearily, and she said, 'Miss Sahib, you are my mother! How much have you done for me in the school. Now, suffering, I understand you. You need teachers. The teacher Taj is gone. And I said to his father, "Why should I not go now for a while and teach for the Miss in her school? If it is not beneath the dignity of a white lady, of Miss Bhose, to teach Moslems and everybody, why should it be beneath us?" And he said, "Go and help them, for they have shown us kindness always, and your baby will not be born till the summer heat is over and the grandmother can look after the weaned child." So I'll come if you like, and I'll teach without salary, Miss Sahib.'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

Davida, looking at Miss Bhose, saw tears spring into her eyes. It was intolerable to her — the way these Ram Chunders had to humble themselves. Viro would teach in the Mission school, would she, taking Taj's place? And the women saw Miss Bhose was moved, and the strange woman, she who was still shining with gold, even her protecting skirt of emerald green silk having a border a foot wide of gold thread, she took her turn. Her husband, the doctor's brother, couldn't eat or sleep because of the sorrow that had come to the family. And the family that owned the house next to the school, they wished greatly to betroth their nephew to the infant daughter of the doctor's brother. And now the brother had made up his mind to say that unless they let the Mission have that house, which they didn't need and didn't use, and were only holding for spite, the betrothal would never take place. The doctor's brother was the champion of all advanced movements for women. His own daughters all went to school day by day, getting up early in the morning. And he said this haughty conservative would never have a child of his unless they turned that house over to the Mission at a reasonable price — Davida felt Miss Bhose's eyes fixed upon her — because how could you be sure your daughter would ever be happy in a family that didn't believe in the education of women?

Viro broke forth again. 'The doctor had said, "Yes, go and offer to teach. For who knows what is before you. You may be a starving widow, begging

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

the Mission for a chance to earn your bread," he said.' And she wept. And they all wept. And Miss Bhose said, 'Now you see how it is. And they oughtn't to marry that child into a family that doesn't approve of girls' schools. How else can they be sure of that man's approval of girls' schools?'

'I'll speak to the Sahib at once, as soon as I see him. I promise you,' said Davida. 'But you mustn't expect he can do much.'

But as soon as she saw him — he looked in on his way home from the city later that afternoon — she asked —

'What's that you've got on your coat?'

'I think it was — a turnip — some time ago. Somebody threw it at me as I passed the police station. I thought I had got it all off.'

Davida sniffed sympathetically. He shrugged his shoulders, brushing it away.

'They've been throwing things at me — more or less — all day. I was — offered a bribe — two of them, to-day, Miss Sahib!'

'Oh, Sahib! Dr. Ram Chunder?'

'Ram Chunder? No. Not quite so bad as that. But still, the man knew me — a lawyer — he has been in the city council with me term after term. It was that Pundit Ram.'

'Just like him!'

'He said that if I — would fail to identify that leader — if I would say I couldn't be sure — he said I would be a rich man by the time this was over. And when I told him what I thought of him, he

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

apologized by saying that of course he wouldn't have thought of making the suggestion last week. I don't think he — meant to rub it in. I don't think I have been offered a bribe before — for fifteen years. At least — not for ten. I'm sure of it.'

'I see. Now —' she hesitated.

'Yes. I dare say things look different to them. I do, I mean. Just as things — people — seem different to me since that night — when they laughed — spitting on me. Human nature seems — different, somehow. They're saying now — swearing by the hour — that Jalal has been threatening for years to involve them in this affair, blackmailing them for years. They've got a list of the women he handed over — to the guilty men, and their fathers and husbands all ready to swear to it. They say he threatened to hire that man to cry out and call to me as I passed unless they "coughed up." They say his wife decoyed the women. The worst of it is, the alderman has gone over to them, has given Jalal and his wife up to them, so to speak. He had to, I suppose. He had to cut with us altogether, or come out on our side, losing all the property he has. He had divorced his wife —'

'Not that old one?'

'Yes. She blames it on to the Christians — to your Christmas plant. He said — they say — that after the peace the plant gave him, he couldn't have her in the house any longer. Her people say that they have got a letter I wrote Jalal promising him a nice plump white woman to marry if he would let me baptize

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

him. Her people, of course, have the whole town behind them. He had to give in, take her back, and renounce Jalal to the Moslems. Of course, it does look as if Jalal – and everybody else in the village – Moslems and Christians – must have had an inkling of what was going on – in Pir Khanwala – at least since that night. And they say, the Moslems, if Jalal and I give evidence – convicting Moslems, all the Christians in the district will be beaten till their skins come off. I tried to get Jalal to leave, for awhile. I don't think his life is safe, there. But he wouldn't listen. He wouldn't leave his people in their trouble, he said.'

As he was leaving, she thought of the Ram Chunders.

'Can't you do anything for those poor souls?' she asked him. 'Can't you get the Police Sahib to see they aren't bled, any more?'

'I did speak to him, I told him – what a man the father was. But he believes the son is a thorough-going knave. He said he had bought himself out of prison, time after time, red-handed. Of course his father isn't going to believe he's guilty. How can I tell whether he is or not? He's been spending a lot of money – for his – political views. And I don't know where he can have got it. I'm sorry for Ram Chunder. I always knew the boy hadn't any character. But I didn't foresee this.'

When the Police Sahib came again to Davida's bungalow, the next afternoon, she appreciated the fact that missionaries had increased enormously in

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

importance to him. He had lived within a few rods of her for a year without coming to see her. Now this was the third call within a week. Affable he was, and affable he intended to remain. But his intention faded presently. For Davida, at his request, took him into Miss Monroe's stripped dressing-room, where on the bed the Sister lay unconscious.

'Feel her pulse,' she suggested in a tone that added, 'if you don't believe what I say.'

But he drew back, annoyed. The doctor had told him she wouldn't last long. It was useless to expect evidence from her. 'I triumphed. You didn't take her away to torment her,' Davida thought, saying nothing.

'What do you keep her here for now? She isn't conscious any longer. You might as well send her to the hospital, now, surely.'

'I suppose I might. But I'm not going to.' How she hated men — that one in particular. She misquoted poetry at him maliciously, the line that had been in her head all day.

'For none but I makes much of naught, God said.'

'Beg pardon,' he murmured.

She repeated it. 'Francis Thompson, you know,' she said.

He murmured a suggestion of recognition, but he didn't deceive her. Francis Thompson might be an American missionary, for all he knew. They eyed each other suspiciously, uncompromisingly.

'I'd better question that other native woman — that one who heard what she said to Ramsey.'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'Oh, Miss Bhose. Well, I suppose you could see her now. She lives in that house.' Davida pointed across the compound, from the veranda. 'I'll walk over with you, if you like.'

She thought perhaps he didn't like. But she wanted to be present at the interview. He made no objection, so they walked down the path beneath the acacia trees together.

Now Miss Bhose's one-story bungalow, of terracotta brick, seemed from the path a small copy of Davida's. The front of it, the veranda of cramped and narrow arches, was Anglo-American-Moorish. But the back of it — ah, the back of it was Bengali-Punjabi, all hidden from view by a high mud wall which formed a courtyard facing the back veranda. That courtyard, shaded by a mango tree, littered with brass cooking vessels, earthen waterpots, stools, beds and examination papers, was, for the most of the year, the kitchen, the dining-room, the sitting-room and bedroom for what Davida called Miss Bhose's tribe. Naturally the five marriages of her father had provided her with many brothers and sisters, whole — half — or even lesser. Some of them by this time had lost their husbands, some their wives, some their jobs and some their health and reputation. But to judge from that courtyard, none of them had ever lost any children. Or, if they had, they would have found them there. For some of these wards she was getting jobs. For some she was making marriages. Some she was nursing, some she was coaching, some she rejoiced over, some she be-

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

wailed. But to all she handed out uncounting, money – all her comparatively large salary, so that she was usually practically penniless.

When the Police Sahib and Davida came up on to the veranda, and called out their approach, they smelt the odour of rich and, Davida thought, delicious food, cooking for the younger members of the clan. There was a scuffling and a hustling, and a whispering – ‘the Miss and the Police Sahib with her!’ and presently the door of the little state drawing-room was opened, and Miss Bhose herself was asking them in, a lantern in her hand and calling for a lamp to be lit.

It was a real Anglo-Indian drawing-room; it had a cotton carpet with bright navy blue and crimson stripes a foot wide running across it. There were cane chairs and a deck-chair adorned with pillows, and the mantelpiece was covered with Christmas cards, and little tidies and scarves, nondescript bits of love were sticking about on everything. On the centre table in the dim light of a lamp –

‘Hullo! What’s this?’ asked the Sahib. He picked up one of the large volumes from the stack of books and dropped it as if it had been hot. ‘My God!’ he said. ‘The Britannica!’ He looked at Miss Bhose.

‘It’s not mine, sir,’ she apologized. ‘It’s the Miss Sahib’s. She has the kindness to lend it to me to read. But I haven’t had time even to finish one volume.’ He looked at Davida. She sat maliciously silent. ‘I’ll let him think I commit them to memory,’ she thought.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

He explained his errand, somewhat daunted, Davida fancied. Yes, said Miss Bhose, there was no doubt about it. The Sister had undoubtedly been held a prisoner at some time, in the house of the Missionary Sahib's humiliation. Miss Bhose could swear that in her presence she had described the street, the house, the very tree shading it. She could swear to that. But when the Police Sahib said she would probably have to, she said she wouldn't. It wouldn't be convenient just now, before the Government exam, because the Hindus would be too furious and would take their daughters out of school. He then lost patience entirely.

'My word!' he said, too shortly. 'You speak as if the Mission school was the first consideration. You won't have any choice in the matter!'

He looked at her, glaring. He looked – with increasing discomfort, and in the dim light Davida saw him getting red. For he had, to glare with, only his youth and official position. But Miss Bhose had presence. She had years and birth and character. And she was looking straight at him, with her magnificent old head erect, looking steadily at him with her long upper lip, that had by its might quelled through the seasons such an army of naughty children – she sat looking at him, and when she spoke, Davida gloated over the gentleness, the dignity of her voice.

'Excuse me, sir,' she said. 'Excuse me, hazur,' resorting to a humble word of Indian deference in case her English might be at fault. 'I am the King's

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

loyal woman. So the Mission school has been the first consideration since before when you were a mewling baby. I teach learning to girls – first. Afterwards I do what other duty the Government requires.’

Then the Sahib spoke civilly, so that Davida said to herself that certainly he wasn’t as bad an official as they said he was.

‘I quite understand that, madam. But the fact remains that you have no choice but to give evidence, tell what you know – if I summon you.’

She turned to Davida.

‘If I decide to go, will you go with me?’

‘Me? I certainly will not. Not if I’m not summoned.’

‘Besides,’ said the P.O., ‘there was the matter of that teacher.’ Hadn’t Miss Bhose reported a teacher kidnapped? What was the story? So Miss Bhose told it to him in torrential Urdu, what a good teacher she was, how many days had passed since her disappearance, how his native subordinates had done nothing, how they never did anything for the Mission school ever since that time she had reported them to their superior for violating its purdah. He knew all about that episode, he assured her dryly. And Davida said that of course there wasn’t a bit of evidence that the teacher had ever been kidnapped. And as they came away, she begged him, if indeed he did intend to make a search for Taj, to do it as privately as possible. For, you know, I’m not sure, she may be – married, or something of that sort, she said, and we don’t want any scandal. So he sniffed,

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

and said he quite understood, and he would do what he could for them. It would be no trouble to find her, he said.

That night the Dying Sister fulfilled her name. At three in the morning when Davida went into her room, she was lying as she had lain at twelve. Her eyes, though, were open. Open, but not seeing. Davida bent over her listening, looking, holding the candle close down, while the darkness of the room blew in gusts of shadows over the black face. Then she went back to her room and lighted her lamp, and came and looked closely, and understood that the Sister had only now died. She straightened her limbs, and folded her hands, so that the withered one was covered by the good one. She didn't know then that the Sister had willed her estate on her wrists, the tin bracelets worth eight cents, so she didn't take them off. She went to a cupboard, and got out a fresh piece of white cloth, and wrapped it for a veil around the head, the veil of a modest woman. Then she shut the eyes.

But they came slowly open. She held her fingers on them for some time. Still they opened, stupid, blinking eyes. She went to her desk, and got little coins to put on them, and a rug to wrap about herself for she was shivering. The coins kept slipping off the eyes, down into the veil — beneath the head. It isn't so easy as it sounds, she thought. She regretted not being more skilful in these last services of the dead. Since there were no undertakers in Aiyanianwala, she had often helped the First Lady

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

prepare their dead for burial. The First Lady knew the whole thing – how to make missionary coffins, and how to line them, softly, with new silk, so that they looked like American coffins. Davida had helped her make the coffin for little Paul Ramsey who had died of diphtheria, and helped her put the little body in it. But this body, it would have no coffin. It would have a bit of cheap cotton wrapped about it. The eyes still opened slowly. Davida sneezed with the cold. Why should I sit here waiting for these eyes to close, she thought, when no one in the world cares whether they are decently closed or not? She heard the watchman shuffling along on the gravel outside the window to show how vigilant he was now since the kidnapping. She opened the door.

‘The Sister has died,’ she said to him.

‘God have mercy on us,’ he prayed, coming into the light of her lamp from the darkness beyond. ‘Shall I go and call Miss Bhose to get up?’

‘No,’ said Davida. The teachers, then? No, they had their day’s work to do. Why should they be disturbed? ‘Let me at least call my wife, then,’ he begged. ‘You alone here, with the dead. It is not fitting.’ But she felt very heroic, and said no. ‘The eyes will stay shut if you put the piece on thus,’ he said. So they waited together, she wrapped in her rug, and he wrapped in many ill-smelling cotton draperies. Then she sent him away.

She locked the door after him. She picked up the lamp, and went back to her bedroom, leaving darkness and the dead behind her. She jumped into bed,

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

blew out the lamp on the table at her bedside. She lay down — trying to tuck her down quilt under her head for a pillow. She felt lonely.

The next morning, as soon as the body had been carried away to the Christian burial-ground — that unshaded, dusty, desolate place where Davida supposed she would eventually lie — she got into her trap and drove to the Flowery Basti. From all the bastis, the Christians had been coming to their Sahib and their Miss in terror and amazement. 'What is this fury now that has alighted upon our backs as we knelt in prayer?' they were asking. 'Why has our Sahib fallen upon our masters, the Moslems, and cast them into prison because of the kidnapping? For when they heard the Miss was kidnapped, they mingled their tears with ours, and wept aloud. And now with sticks and clubs and beatings they command us to intercede with our Sahib, if we wish our children to live longer. Why has this hard fate come upon us, when we are innocent?' If distant villages were being so terrorized, what must have happened to those who bore the brunt of it, in the Flowery Basti?

When she got there a Christian girl saw her getting out of her cart. Instead of running with shrieks of victory to be the first to greet the Miss, she ran back quietly. And Davida entering the Moslem street saw Moslem women scowling at her. She came to a doorway where three of them stood talking.

They made no sign of the usual kindly greeting. One of them said, as she drew near:

'Here's the Sweepers' Virgin, again!'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'Virgin?' another asked. She laughed.

Davida would have overlooked the tone, and spoken to them as usual. But the third burst out passionately, hatefully:

'And a fine wise virgin she is, too. She knows how to make herself valued. One night she is away from them, and the white Sahibs go mad, and run about the district, casting us into prison. That's the sort of virgin to be, my sisters! May God destroy her and all her sweepers!'

Two Christian women and a man were coming out now, to meet her. They had heard the curses, and Davida had to lift her hand quickly to them with Punjabi entreaty, to hush the retorts they were about to hurl in her defence. The man said quickly – he was one of the Christmas serenaders –

'You haven't come alone? Haven't you heard about the pastor?'

'What about the pastor?'

He cried in a whisper in her ear:

'Miss Sahib, he was driven away – out of the quarter – out of the town – last night. This morning, rather – his family with him.'

He was leading her, with the women who were gathering, into the school courtyard.

'Look at that!'

The garden, with its strong young hollyhocks, its nasturtiums beginning to vine, was trampled, crushed, uprooted.

'Look at this!' It was the door of the pastor's one large room that he was pointing to.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'The house is empty. Has he taken his furniture?' Davida cried.

'Look at this staple! 'Twas an angel of the Lord that struck them blind in the night, as I believe. For look you, if they had given this lock one more blow, the staple would have yielded. And the family would have been destroyed. In one more minute. When they had pounded and rammed so long, why did they not give one more thrust? God knows!'

'Tell me what happened.'

But he said to a child, 'Go and call some of the brothers from the field. I have been prostrate with fever myself, Miss Sahib. It is better to have some strong man about you here, now.'

'Oh, surely I don't need strong men! I won't stay if you don't want me.'

Oh, they wanted her, they needed her more than ever – only – since the kidnapping – they looked at each other nervously – you can't tell what may happen nowadays, they said, watching down the street.

Subdued, resigned, spiritless they sat down about her, sighing tremendously, shrugging the palms of their hands. 'Let us look at her again and give it all up,' they sighed. It had been sweet while it lasted, the flowery school for the children. But we are of the dunghill, and to the dunghill we have returned, they said.

'What nonsense!' retorted Davida. 'You listen to what I say. Do you suppose I'm going to let my dear school go to pieces this way! We'll plant a new garden. There are plenty more seeds at my

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

house. We'll have a new school. We'll have a new teacher!

'But we'll have no teacher like that one!' they sighed. She had no answer for that. Truly a teacher of that sort was seldom available. Had there even been seen in the district such a school for glad singing, and counting of oxen, and flowers like great bright trees? It was but a little school — a minute seed of a school, Davida said. Yes, they said, a seedling. And it had been trampled on. Come now, said Davida, let's sing a song. Let us lift up our voices and be gay. But no. The Moslems would be listening, and they would be angrier. They can't hurt us, Davida argued. It is our right to be happy if we want to. She might begin. But scarcely a child would join her. And the women turned uneasily to look over the wall, to see what might be coming.

But there was one thing, one last rite, as they said, they would perform. They would set food before her. They might be perishing, they might be waiting for the stroke of death, but they would feed their guest. While they had breath, they had hospitality. The woman of an adjoining house had set about her duty at once. Davida had seen her at it, out of the corner of her eye. The woman had brought out from her one room a tall and very dirty pewter tumbler. She had washed it squatting in front of the earthen water jar on the floor. She had wiped it thoroughly on the second-hand veil she had worn on her head daily for three months. She had sent out and borrowed coarse

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

brown sugar and put a couple of inches of it in the bottom of the vessel. Then she had poured into the cup more than half a pint of scorched water-buffalo milk. Then she had looked to see if there were any black specks of visible scorching floating on the top of the thick greyish-yellow liquid. There were some, and she put a persistent finger in and fished them out, all the watching women giving her advice. Then she gave it with dignity, with the satisfaction of having done the right thing in the right manner, to her dear Miss. By this time the women about her had recovered enough spirit to resent the insult which had been given her in the street as she came. The women who had heard it, had begun indignantly to tell the others. She was cursed, was she, with them? Well, what could they do about it? They would feed her, that's what they would do. They would get her a sugar-cane to chew. They would get her pop-corn. Drink your milk, they commanded her, with tender indignation. Has it got enough sugar in it? Miriam, did you put a great deal of sugar in it, for the Miss who is cursed with us?

Now Davida's man, in his foolish youth, had preached a sermon about Indian food, from the text which he cleverly found in Corinthians — 'Love digesteth all things.' It had been a scandal at the time, that dissertation. But Davida still loved it. Long ago she had learned to control a certain Anglo-Saxon spasm of her interior, a rebellion of her stomach which transpired at certain tastes and odours. Does one's gorge really rise up and down,

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

and bob about? she had once futilely asked the doctor. Buffalo's milk, even now, after these persistent years, still managed almost to upset, bodily discipline.

Yet there she sat, on the dirty bed, in the khaki courtyard, in a blaze, in a very bleaching fire of sunshine which kept her eyes screwed almost shut, though her sun-hat was pulled down over them as far as possible, there she sat, in the midst of that ill-smelling crowd, in her blue cotton frock, and sipped that hospitality as she went on talking. Not one eye now turned away from the sight. That was the true bread of heaven being broken in the sacrament of life. That was the true and blessed communion, for those kicked and disheartened women, the sight of the white lips, of what seemed to them very high-caste lips, against their despised cup. She took a sip. they sighed all round the circle, drinking in comfort. The Sahib would be coming out to see them. They mustn't suppose she minded the insult from a woman who was upset. She would be coming often. They would get a very good new teacher. It wasn't her words that comforted them. It was the next slow sip she took of the sacramental upsetting. They couldn't imagine how she was drinking it through the gritted teeth of her soul. 'It is delicious — your milk. I have had enough, now. I am refreshed. You drink the rest of it.' Her entreaty was more earnest than they could understand. 'No! It is for you! Drink you all of it! We have plenty more!' They would have said that if they had been starving for

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

the last drops. Well – if she could do nothing more for them . . . she would do that. ‘Lovest thou Me?’ her Master said to her. ‘Feed My lambs.’ She swallowed the scorched dregs of it.

Then the man who had been sitting alertly on his haunches watching for the moment, rose and said he would go with her to her trap. Her impulse was to say she wasn’t going yet – not for a long time. Then she realized that her being there made him uneasy, for the strong men he had sent for hadn’t come. She wouldn’t go quickly, however. She wouldn’t let them think she was afraid. He made a gesture demanding that an old man sitting there in the sun come along with him. ‘And you come, too,’ he said to the women.

So Davida with the two men, half a dozen of the less reluctant women, and almost the usual rag-tag end of children, started out towards her trap. The men were carrying her bag of books, and her eye medicine. The women had sugar-cane they had insisted on giving her. They came to where her horse was standing sleepily on three legs, at one side of the road. The new syce sat on his haunches directly in front of the horse. On the other side of the road a number of Moslems had gathered. They got up to salaam her, politely enough, calling her Sir. She climbed into her cart. They gathered about it. They had a request to make – an urgent request. They all began talking at once. Would she be kind enough to intercede with the Police Sahib about the brother of this one of them who had been cast into jail on a

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

false and malicious charge of hers – for a crime of which he knew nothing?

Her heart sank. She excused herself hastily. They would have to see the Sahib about it themselves. She had no power in these things. It was not the custom of white ladies, etc., etc. Her pariah escort would have explained as much to these Moslem besetters, but they were summarily hushed. 'You must excuse me,' she said firmly. But they ranged themselves in the road in front of her. 'Be kind enough to stand aside. Let me pass!' she insisted. The syce who was standing up behind her on his seat, cried 'Get out of the way.' Some one seized the horse's bridle, frightening him into a plunge.

In an instant then – they were like wolves about her – horrible – climbing up – or –

But that instant, even, she knew some one was running to her rescue. She felt him, or saw him, coming bounding along the path by the village wall, doing a sort of pole-vault, shouting – 'Hai! Stop it! You begetters of swine! Wait till I get at you! I'll break your lousy heads into a multitude of bits! Stand aside there, I say! Stand aside! My stick will finish you –'

Some one – and a great stick – arrived with a leap at the spot where a moment before a crowd had threatened her. The crowd – it had faded away – there were merely a few men standing where they had retreated at some distance. She realized a lad, close beside her, crying in triumphant English:

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'Fear not, Madam. Look at me! B.A. Fail!'

'I'm not afraid!' she retorted, automatically.

'You lie! You are! I see your face! But look at me!'

A heavenly sight he was. A handsome young Hindu, smartly dressed, in a woollen suit made by a good tailor, his immaculate and expensive turban adjusted dashingly. His fair face was all alight with excitement and pleasure in his rôle of rescuer. If he failed to get a university degree, he was proud to announce that he had attempted it.

'I arrive to save you from these uninstructed fools and rabbles! I saw them gathered about your cart lately, and I dissolved them in time.' And he turned towards the men, with a horrible angry grimace, and let out a volley of obscene abuse at them, never thinking she understood Punjabi. And then, turning back to her, he adjusted his face into an expression of innocent regret.

'I apologize for them. They make me ashamed. My father's cursed, thieving tenants, they are, and I shall screw them all into the dust for their unpoliteness to you. How they dared to touch you—'

'They didn't touch me!'

But the syce was trembling still. 'They seized the bridle!' he said. Davida silenced him. The lad turned glowering to let out another torrent of abuse upon the Mohammedans and then again he looked at the lady, and made his face sweetly angelic.

'I have myself a small request to make to you,' he said in the most winning way. Davida at once

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

imagined how he had been brought up, with zenanas full of admiring mothers and aunts and servants standing about, to take his least whim seriously. She almost smiled, so eager he was – so boyish – so entirely pleased with himself.

‘These are bad ignorant fools of men, and I have rescued you from them.’ ‘You damned unhealthy swine, you did me a good turn for once, in spite of yourself!’ he cried at them. And then to the lady, engagingly:

‘I swear by God, by Our Father which art in Heaven, I love you. I swear by God I love all Sahibs, male and females, American and English. But chiefly I love those gentlemen connected with Mission Colleges. Miss Sahib, you know that Jones Sahib, in Lahore!’

‘How do you know I do?’

‘I saw you there at his house – with his lady Sahib. He is that gentleman that doesn’t understand me entirely. He makes – annoyance for me with the Principal. Will you write him a letter and tell him how I jerk you out of multitudes? Tell him I count every hair that falls from you in my village. Intercede for me!’

‘What have you been doing?’

He grinned. He shrugged his thin shoulders. He had the grace of a man whose ancestors have never since the Aryan invasion lifted a burden, overstrained a muscle. He cast aside discreetly the memory that made him smile, of delicious wickedness, and looked up at Davida grievedly:

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'Always I have not seen eye to eye with him. We – disagreed. He – well – could you not believe it? – he dispensed with me from the Institution. Now I am but a studious man. Already once I have failed. I want to read for exams, merely. Would you ask him to take me back?'

'Did he send you away for good?'

'God forbid! Only he dispensed with me.'

'For how long?'

'For the future. You know, these multitudes might have inflicted upon you! These fools of ignorant beefeaters! If I hadn't happened to come just then what might have took place?'

She looked at him. She recalled the large brick house beyond the village that usually stood unoccupied – the one brick building in the neighbourhood.

'Do you live here?'

He gave a snort of disgust.

'A man like me! Certainly I live in cities! My parents live in Lahore. They have dispensed with me also. They expect me to read here – in this country, pitifully. Now if you would write to the Sahib for me . . .'

'It wouldn't do any good. It wouldn't convince the Sahib – that you intended to work – the fact that you were kind to me here to-day.'

'Ah, but I swear by Jesus Christ that I repent. If they will take me back, I will work! How shall I inflict – these – rabble – these attackers of you? Shall I beat them for you? Oh –' he cried, delighted by his clever idea, 'shall I not tell these – these –' he

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

waved his hand airily at Davida's humble escort, at a loss for a word for them not offensive to her — 'these —' he murmured, and found it — 'these your depressed classes — I will have them beat the Moslem fools —'

'You will do nothing of the kind!' she said, emphatically. 'Tell them decently they mustn't catch hold of the bridle. It frightens my horse.'

'You lie. It frightens you. But I will —' he looked at her depressed classes, and recalled apparently sentences from some essay — 'You know — a man like me, my whole life is wholesomely devoted to social reform. I lack no moral courages.'

'Goodness!' exclaimed Davida.

'Do you command me to eat with your — er — classes?'

For any abomination that was a lark she saw he was ready at a moment's notice.

'Don't try any of your stunts on my classes! They have trouble enough without your starting any row with your parents!'

She had called his bluff, but he went persuasively on —

'I came to you now defaulting along hastily, and I rescued you from their paws and claws. My name, Krishna Lal, B.A. fail. Only once. My unhearty parents dispensed me to these remotes. My health is injuring here, among these swine and general uncongenials. I repent by night and same by day. I will work hard. Write to the Sahib for me, Miss Sahib!'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

The buffalo milk and the excitement were striving together strongly, aided by all the inner rebels to upset bodily discipline. Davida exclaimed suddenly:

‘I must go!’

‘Wait! Descend! Let me get something – some refreshment before you – in my humble dwelling. Let me serve you.’

‘Thank you. I must go. Well, then, I will write to the Sahib, and tell him what you have done, to-day.’ The sense of these devouring wolves climbing around her made her faint. ‘I will tell him – you were very – useful to me. But you must behave yourself, if I intercede for you! You must get to work!’ She nodded to her depressed classes, and to him, and touched her horse.

He drew up sharply, and stood at salute, crying:

‘I will come to your bungalow, and take him the letter repentedly, myself.’ And at attention he stood there, till she was far down the road.

CHAPTER VIII

She drove home trying to put away from her mind the humiliating horror of that moment. The indignity, the idea of them daring – Thank God that lad was there – thank God for him! If he hadn't – if those men had dared to touch me – *me* Davida Baillie, an American. Oh, she said, bitterly, I am as bad as the Police Sahib, as bad as the silliest arrogant Englishman who ever vaunted the superiority of his white skin. The very thought of being on a level with an Indian woman – of not being set up on a pedestal – makes my blood boil, when you get right down to brass tacks. She remembered a little wisp of a frail English University woman, a missionary, to whom she had said in her first days, 'Aren't you afraid here alone, among Indians?' 'I? Afraid? I consider myself the match of any forty Indian men. Who would dare to touch me?' And I've said that to myself a thousand times since, pretending to be so much more sympathetic than the English, thought Davida. Now how shall I keep this from the Sahib! He won't like this, not a little bit.

She thought over her predicament wearily. If she didn't tell him, some one else would, and he would distrust her even more. The Police Sahib even might hear of it. She mourned her garden. What right had they to put their wicked feet upon her hollyhocks? The garden – the symbol of her success. And then the feeling of that nightmare of a moment would come back – such fear – such terror as she in

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

her civilized life had never known. I'm glad the Sister is dead, if she had moments like these, she thought.

And when she drove into her compound, John Ramsey, seeing her from his veranda, came in after her.

'I'm glad you're back. I didn't know where you were. And you can laugh if you want to, but it makes me uncomfortable. Where have you been?'

She said flatly, getting out:

'I've been at the Flowery Basti. Syce, tell them to bring tea for both of us at once.'

'You haven't!' said John Ramsey.

'Sit down,' she said. 'Let me go and wash my hands, and we'll have tea. I need – something.'

When she came back, he said seriously:

'Davida, didn't you know that Jalal had just been driven out of there? You went there alone just because you were afraid to!'

'I did not! I never thought of being afraid. I hadn't the least idea in the world that Jalal wouldn't be there. How was I to know that anything like that had happened?'

He looked at her intently.

'Didn't you have – just a – very vague idea – of what had happened?'

'No. I told you the truth. I hadn't a suspicion in the world. I've been wanting to go for several days. Sahib, what are we going to do for them? Where are you going to get me a new teacher? I won't let that school just disappear into nothing!'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

But he wasn't to be so easily diverted.

'You hadn't any trouble, to-day? Nobody – said anything – to you? Was everything quiet?'

'Yes. Quiet as death. Far too quiet. That is *almost* everything, Sahib.'

'Go on!' he said, grimly.

Then she told him how she had been jerked out of the multitude. 'That lad,' she said hurriedly, 'was just a dear. It was a rich young man like him that Jesus looking at loved suddenly.' And then she stopped, realizing that even that part of the story was distasteful to him. He couldn't stand having her owe even one breath of safety to an Indian man – or admire in passing a Hindu lad.

'You send him to me when he comes,' he said dryly. 'I'll give him his letter.'

She thought best not to demur. She tried to get him to plan for a new teacher for the basti. But he was intent upon her.

'You're just incorrigible. I did warn you. Now you must promise me not to go to villages, not to any at all – alone – till this is over.'

'Don't worry about that! I won't. I've had my lesson. I don't want to get them into any more trouble. Promise me you won't tell the Police Sahib what happened. For nothing did happen, really. Promise me, Sahib.'

But he wouldn't.

'I'm not promising anything till I've had time to think,' he said stubbornly.

Davida as soon as she was free ran over to the

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

Sahib's compound to see if Jalal's family was comfortable for the night. She found them settled, camping, as it were, for the few days until the trial would be over, in a small room in a low row of servants' houses not far from the back veranda of John Ramsey's bungalow. As Davida passed those humble homes the Moslem and Christian women invited her in. Wouldn't she just come and taste what they had in their pot? they called, hospitably. But she made polite excuses, and they sighed with sympathy when she said she was going to see Jalal's family. And the watchman's wife, deserting her bread-making, followed her into Begum's little room.

A lantern that belonged to John Ramsey was giving them not so good a light as it would have given if his wife had been with him, but still enough to show that Begum had made her family as comfortable as she could. She had been weeping. She welcomed Davida fervently, giving her the one little stool in sight. The watchman's wife pulled out from the little pile of furniture another one, and gave it to Begum, for she was trying to get her baby to sleep.

'I have no supper to offer you, Miss Sahib. Forgive me. I have not cooked food to-day. The neighbours, these good sisters, gave us supper. The Sahib gave us a lantern. He gave the children all milk. Their father has gone to the bazaar to buy meal for the morning, with the watchman and an elder of the town church who was here — both strong men, yet my foolish heart is restless till he returns in safety. I can't see him out of my sight to-day. You

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

heard how the good kind God delivered us – how He saved us. Look, Miss Sahib! Two sleep on that bed. Three sleep on this! Five. And this one in my arms. Six. All safe. All unhurt. Fear has curdled my milk, and made this one of my arms unwell. But we have all our little birds. Sleeping safely. How shall we thank God for the six, Miss Sahib.’ Tears came welling into Begum’s eyes while she kissed her peevish baby passionately, and the watchman’s wife clucked and groaned out a proper accompaniment.

Davida said she had heard about it in the village. Then Begum seized her hand, and began:

‘You didn’t go there! Oh Miss Sahib, God’s favourite child, you mustn’t go there. Promise me you will never go to that place of curses again. For fire may fall from heaven on them, some day, and hurt you, with the rest. For such things they said to us, in the darkness, trying to break in through our door! Dash out the brains of my girls first, they cried, and then the boys they would – Oh, God their Creator blushed! He didn’t know where to look for shame, such things they said. And inside, us afraid to light a wick – praying, stumbling about, holding one another – “Don’t wake the children,” their father said. “They will never know what has happened to them.” But they woke. Two of them. And we lifted the others off the bed and hid them under the quilts, and piled the beds against the door – but what good would that have been if the door had not held! And me praying all the time, “Let me die first. Let my eyes not see it.” I hid the children, but they had –

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

lights, outside. And I prayed their father might die first and be spared the sight of — the rest of it. And cursing, they were. If they had known the large window the Sahib had had made in the back of the room — but they didn't. And when the noise ceased, the children's father would have opened the door and run to wake up his people. But I held him. They might have been waiting outside. And I held him, weeping, till we saw the morning light coming in. And finally — it was very long — we heard the good elder cursing his oxen as he brought them out of his room to feed them. And then we opened the door, and there the staple that held the chain — if they had given another blow — I wonder now why my children's father tarries! I told him to hurry back, to comfort me. Look, Miss Sahib. Three asleep on that bed. Two on this. And one, my little sweetheart, this blessed little bit of my liver, here on my breast. Six. Six.'

Tears came unexpectedly into Davida's eyes. She understood terror now too well — as she couldn't have imagined a few hours before.

'We mustn't think of these things, Begum,' she said.

'Their father says, We have ourselves, we have our six, and we have three beds, one with painted legs, two stools, four quilts, our woollen shawl, our pots and kettles, and our congregation will bring us the salary due to us — in meal and money — next week — We can begin all over again. We had only the painted bed when we began first — no woollen

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

shawl. And we were young and without knowledge. God values us, for some reason, the Father of Bobby says. Else why did that staple hold? I think an angel struck them blind, myself. Besides, when they drove us out – the Moslem elders came and they drove us out with curses, saying we were the pets of the Government, and if anyone did us injury they would suffer – as we came away – our people followed us weeping, crying aloud – giving us presents. They gave what they had to offer us. Three new homespun sheets, and a great bundle of cotton ready for spinning. And the song leader gave the children's father his new pewter tumbler, weeping like a baby. They are desolate now, our people. Miss Sahib, who will be their new teacher? Listen! That's him! That's the baby's father, talking to the watchman!

Jalal came in. Over his shoulder he had a stick. And tied to the stick were three parcels, a large one of meal, and two smaller ones. Begum with the baby still in her arms, rose and relieved him of them while he spoke to the Miss.

She said –

'Well, Padre Sahib, you've left the Flowery Basti.'

He stood awkwardly looking at her.

'Yes.'

There was a moment of silence.

'I thought another place might be better for the small folk.'

'Is that *all* you have to say to her?' cried Begum to him. 'Do you know she WENT there, alone, to-day? Speak to her. Tell her of last night. She will go

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

there *again*, otherwise. Father of Bobby, speak to her!’

He couldn’t well offer her a bed to sit on, and he hesitated to sit on a stool as her equal. So he stood till she rose as if to go.

He said:

‘Mother of Bobby, she is in God’s care. The staple held, didn’t it?’

‘It did hold. But it only *just* held. We didn’t know it would hold. We were in agony.’

‘That was our little faith, Mother of Bobby.’ He turned to Davida sweetly. ‘However, I think you would do well, if I might advise you – to consult the Ramsey Sahib about your goings, now – for a little. We can’t throw ourselves down from heights, and expect the good kind Lord to be at the bottom to pick us up – not all the time, when He has so large a world to manage. Did you see the children?’ he asked suddenly. He lifted the lantern and held it above one bed. Bobby, in the soiled feathery shirt, and two sisters, in their ragged little daytime garments, lay sleeping there. He shifted the lantern, so the light fell on the other bed.

‘Ai, Father of Bobby!’ sighed Begum, bending over them – ‘Three on this bed. Two there. And this one ready to put down! Six! Six! The sweet God loves us!’

Davida said to her Brother before God, as soon as she saw him next day:

‘Promise me now that you won’t tell the Police-wala what happened yesterday!’

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

But he refused. She said the same thing to him the next day, and he still refused. That afternoon the Police-Sahib came again to see her. She went into the drawing-room reluctantly, fabricating a defence as she went.

But he only said in a friendly, casual way, as if Davida and all missionaries were amusing.

'I've found your teacher. You were right. She's married, they say.'

'Who to? Where? How d'you do it? You *are* clever!'

'It was nothing. No trouble at all.' He mentioned the city, not very far away, where she was living. 'The man – he's a nephew of that head mistress of yours, that – old – lady – over there.'

'No!' cried Davida. 'Are you sure? Why – it *couldn't* be!'

'Why not?'

'Well, I mean – you know, he's a Brahmin, by descent. She's low-caste. It – I never heard of such a thing. Are you sure?'

Grinning, he said:

'I thought I'd come and tell you myself, since you asked me to – keep it quiet. Of course I don't know – that anybody saw any – marriage licence. I'm sure they say they are married.'

'Well, this *is* a jolt. It'll be a scandal.'

'You'd rather have had her kidnapped. I thought these native Christians hadn't any caste.'

'They haven't theoretically – any more than Moslems. They're as free from it – as English Chris-

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

tians, or Americans – almost. You're awfully clever. I didn't think –'

'You didn't suppose I could do it?' •

'I mean, I didn't think you could do it so quickly. It is kind of you. Don't think I don't thank you. But you surprised me! I'll have to break the news to Miss Bhose.'

Then he began again after a little, suavely:

'You had some trouble, the other day, hadn't you – in a village? Somebody – insulted you?'

'Me? No. Nobody said anything – to me. You must be thinking of the Sahib.'

'No. I'm thinking of you. There was some unpleasantness, wasn't there, at the place this pastor of yours lived – at Tilianwala?'

'No. Not that I heard of. Why?'

He said, looking straight at her:

'I hear you were – mobbed – or at least –'

'How extraordinary! Who told you that?'

'Isn't it true?'

'No. Not at all! Mobbed? I've never been mobbed in my life!'

'Come now. Tell me as if you were under oath. I insist on hearing your account of – what happened.'

'Well, I – tell you *nothing* happened. Except, as I started away, a man who wanted to ask me something, took hold of my horse's bridle. And another man told him to let go. So he did.'

'Were there only two men there?'

'No. There were – several men. There were two Christian men, and a lot of women and children.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

They always see me off, you know, when I go to that village.'

'Are you willing to swear that that's all that happened?'

'Swear to it? Well, I don't know — Why should I? I don't think — Americans like swearing — to — things of that sort.'

'Shouldn't think they would!' Was that what he muttered?

'You couldn't identify the men I suppose?'

'I could identify — some of them. A Hindu lad. And the Christian men, maybe, if it would oblige you?'

'Not the Moslems?'

'No, I didn't really see them. I never look at — a lot of village men. There are always some of them around, aren't there? I hope — nobody's made up any sort of story, to get the Christians into trouble. I should hate that!'

The Police Sahib told the doctor's wife that evening that Ramsey wasn't a bad sort, after all, but he wouldn't believe a word of that missionary woman under oath. The doctor's wife told Davida the next day. And she answered, merely:

'The dear thing! He believes as I do that the truth is often too good to tell.' But to herself she said — 'Horrid nasty Englishman!'

As soon as he left her, she hurried over excitedly towards Miss Bhose's. As she went she realized the enormity of the shock she was about to inflict so vividly that she took a turning of the path, and in the

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

twilight walked around the compound twice before she could decide to go and break the painful news. Then, when Miss Bhose, in answer to her call, came out to the veranda, she said swiftly:

'Come over to my house a minute. I've got something to tell you.'

She sat her down on a chair by the desk in her bedroom.

'The Police have found Taj.'

'Thank God! Where? When? Is she safe — uninjured? When does she return? Oh, thank God!'

'She is married.'

'No! Alas! That's too bad!' She clucked with her disappointment. 'It's worse than I thought!'

'I suppose — she's happy — perhaps. Let's hope so.'

'Who'd she marry?'

For the life of her Davida couldn't say his name. 'You won't like it, I'm afraid,' she faltered.

'I'm sure I won't. She might have waited till the exam. was over. She is not worthy of the name of teacher! These women — perfectly useless — but whom did she marry? Sly one, that Taj!'

'Your nephew,' said Davida, feeling as if she was firing straight at her.

'My nephew! What nephew of mine? You don't mean — Rabindra Nath. Oh —'

'Yes.'

The lamp wasn't yet lit. It seemed to Davida that Miss Bhose's dark face grew darker and darker, her long lip longer and more severe, her solidity more

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

threatening. Certainly she was breathing deep with rage.

'What time is it? Can I get the six o'clock train?'

'No,' said Davida. She didn't know what time it was, but she wanted Miss Bhose to be delayed till morning.

'I've seen them with my own eyes — looking at each other — in my own house — the vipers — the evil-minded — they can't be married — who would marry them? He was ever a good-for-nothing — and she — the sweeper — it serves them right to be tied together for ever! I resign. I lay my resignation before you. I shall never face that school again. After these years — of championing sweepers — now — in my own home — but that wretch is none of my own, you understand. The nephew merely of my half-brother-in-law's sister's husband.'

'We must go to her mother — tell her.'

'Tell her! She knew it all the time! She has been making sport of me. Coming howling at our Christmas party, knowing where the girl's evil mind had taken her!'

'Nonsense! She couldn't have known.'

'I'm sure she did. I see it all now. She never went across the border seeking her after you had given her the money. Her son wouldn't let her. Why? He knew it all the time. I will get that train. I'll speak my mind to them. I'll break the marriage off. It can't be legal. This'll break up all that's left of the school. This is what Mohammedans, Hindus,

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

— every one, says will happen if you let a girl go to school — and make her independent.’

‘Did you suspect — then — that they — had this in mind — since you guessed at once —’

‘Never! Not in my wildest dreams! He is a good-for-nothing, lazy male, without spirit, without ambitions, nationalistic — seditious — Arya Somaj — but I never suspected such infamy from him. And how many times have you said she was shameless — eyeing men without modesty —’

Miss Bhose had risen to go to the train. Davida detained and persuaded her. ‘If he is no relation to you, really,’ she would have urged.

‘I have reared him like a son. Who has paid his school fees? Who coached him and encouraged him but me? Who sent him to the hills for his lungs’ health. And this is my reward! Could I not go hastily to the station in your trap? I could get back in time for school to-morrow — only a little late.’

Davida sent a servant to ask the time at John Ramsey’s bungalow. Fortunately it was too late for the train. By morning, when the next one was due, Miss Bhose’s anger would have cooled.

And it must have gone on cooling, for when she came to Davida two days later, she had no anger, no spirit left. She was sunk in the bitterest depth of despondency.

‘I found her living there with him. They were sitting side by side on a bed in a veranda — eating breakfast off a table. They looked at each other, speaking with their eyes. They got up and wel-

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

comed me in, or tried to. They wanted me to have breakfast with them! They were bold, shameless. When I spoke to him, he looked at her for instructions – to answer – me! When I spoke to her, she called to him with her eyes to uphold her. Such a lack of shame, of repentance, I never imagined! As for the difference in their ancestors' caste, he said, any Indian who loved his motherland was bound to ignore it. Such marriages were the healing of the motherland from her diseases, he said. He talked that way, as if I couldn't see that his eyes were all the time caressing her without limit. They weren't children, he said. They were of age. They had only followed the English way of choosing for themselves. There were some ways of the barbarian West that were good enough for them, he said. And I said if their marriage was for the sake of India, let them now sacrifice themselves a little for their country. Let her return and teach her Indian class until the Indian Exam., I said. And she, the sly little whiff of the dung-basket, she said – murmuring and agreeing – you know her voice – she would return with me and teach at once, if her husband was willing – knowing he wouldn't let her. He said certainly not. Not for an hour! He wouldn't have his wife working, he said. He wasn't Western enough for that, thank God, he said. And she kept silent, intending to do what she pleased. A nice wife he's got, and it's good enough for him! But my face is darkened. Was it for this I kept him in school? The only one of all those boys who had any promise

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

and brains. If he had wept, only. I say, take my resignation. How many times have I offered it to you? I won't go back and face the girls' parents now.'

She did, of course, go back and face her school. The news had got about the city, and there was in the Christian community a certain base and natural satisfaction in it. After all, Miss Bhose with her years of virginity, her seven languages, her successful great school and her Brahmin descent had lorded it somewhat mercilessly over the humble church. She had espoused, to be sure, the cause of the down-trodden, but without stepping from her heights. She had no scruples about eating with sweeper Christians but she had skill in avoiding occasions when it was necessary. And with them she had always included in her thoughts, alas, even the most highly descended Moslems ever baptized into Christianity. So now — well, people said nastily that it was good enough for her — that Taj was the better of the two. They even said that the gay widow had made a great mistake in marrying that foolish lazy anti-English nationalist, who would probably end in jail. But they all agreed that it was a horrible and awful example of filial impiety, and warned their offspring against such cursed defiance of paternal rights.

In every Christian house the amazing marriage was the more discussed because it was practically unprecedented. Some of the little sweeper Christian lads who had had enough brains to qualify, by means of a Mission education, for highly paid posts, had

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

managed to marry daughters of more or less high-caste converts. Some of these marriages had been conspicuously successful. And the descendants of Hindus had married descendants of Moslems. There was even a rich and mighty Hindu in the city who had defied the whole world of his caste and taken a Moslem courtesan for his wife – the most beautiful woman, Davida sometimes thought, that she had ever seen. And there was a Hindu, but he was a degenerate, opium-eating wretch, who had succumbed to his infatuation with a dirty, ill-smelling, black and broad-nosed sweeper woman. But the 'English' marriage of a clever young B.A. sprig of a Kulin Brahmin with a widow whose first father-in-law still had the contract for removing all the dead animals from the city – well . . .

Miss Bhose said to Davida that she was going to call the school into the assembly-room, and publicly renounce Taj. She had decided to believe that the mother had not known anything about it. She wouldn't acknowledge that that old creature had flouted and deceived her. Davida counselled moderation. Wouldn't it be better to talk it over only with the girls of her form? Better to explain to them how serious a thing it was to cast aside lightly conventions that generations have found good? Better to dwell perhaps on the necessity of schoolgirls justifying their privileges by a behaviour that commended itself to their elders? Better to speak about the freedom of Christian widows to re-marry, and to dwell upon the fact that English women, who had a voice

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

in the choice of their husbands, were grown up, adult at the time, not children?

After all, argued Davida, if we are going to let our young men and women have a certain amount of freedom, get to associating with each other, seeing each other before marriage, things like this are bound to happen. We can't prevent it. 'It never happened to me,' said Miss Bhose. 'I looked unveiled on the faces of all the young men who came to my father's house — and — I don't want to boast — but I kept my state — though no one believes it.' 'Besides,' said Davida, 'we don't approve of this in-breeding, and — who knows what blood is in the girl's veins —' not that such an argument would comfort Miss Bhose — yet still, even the royalist families in Europe do need a little new blood now and then, another infusion. 'But I don't think we, my half-brother-in-law's sister's husband's family needed a carrion-eating infusion,' Miss Bhose retorted. 'That,' said Davida, 'isn't fair. Neither Taj nor her parents ever ate carrion.' 'Still the blood was tainted,' Miss Bhose said, 'and Taj's children might have broad noses, for all the narrowness of her own. And how,' she said, 'am I ever going to be able to stand up and be cross-questioned by that Pundit Lal in court? He would ask me about this marriage, there, before all those men.' 'You don't have to answer questions that don't bear on the subject.' 'But if I refuse, he will know I care. And I can't care. How can I care, being a follower of Christ's? I pretend I don't. But oh —' said Miss Bhose. Afterwards her old servant enlarged upon

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

that cry of sorrow that came from the heart. 'My mistress pretends by day that she doesn't care. But by night she weeps,' she told Davida. 'And she no longer eats food. She will die.'

John Ramsey, too, was dreading that day, the day that was upon them. 'Doesn't it seem strange,' he said to Davida, 'that men can be judges? I never thought of it before. But I am really deciding the fate of the seventeen men. On my word they will be shut up somewhere for years. I never realized the responsibility of these judges – and juries before. They have more than sixty charges against that man. I can't do anything but identify him. It seems to me I could be more sure of that face – than almost any other.'

Davida answered:

'I say we never know what we are doing really. In one way it's my fault. If I hadn't gone to take Miriam to the hospital, you might never have known who these men were. If Miriam had gone to the hospital as I told her to – in plenty of time, as she ought to have gone, after all she suffered before – why then – maybe all those kidnappers would have got off scot free. Maybe nobody could have identified them. Or if Taj had not gone away and got married, making everybody think about kidnapping –'

All of a sudden that afternoon, Taj herself walked in. The afternoons were all alike tempestuous now, each uprooted and hurled about by intercessors more violent, more frantic than those of yesterday. Davida

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

was just coming cautiously out of her dressing-room in which she had taken refuge, opening the door quietly – and there, in her bedroom, stood Taj – Taj in a beautiful new sort of silken drapery, standing there in the midst of her hushed and ordered joy, to exclaim over Davida serenely:

‘Ai, salaam, Miss Sahib! Ai, my dear, dear Miss Sahib, salaam,’ she murmured. And she came and fell into Davida’s arms. ‘How sweet to be with you here!’

‘Well, Taj! You! You bad girl, you very bad girl!’

‘Yes. Scold me! Let’s get it over. It is your duty.’

‘My duty! It’s my pleasure! I haven’t any patience with you!’

‘I said to him, “The Miss Sahib will scold me too. But her heart will be with us, all the time.”’

‘Oh, you did! Well, you might have told us what you were going to do. You needn’t have kept us in hot water all this time!’

‘Shan’t we go into the dressing-room – so that no one will interrupt us? I have so many things to say to you, Miss Sahib.’

Davida shutting the door asked, apprehensively:

‘Why have you come back?’

She sat down, and Taj, helping herself to a stool, leaned against her knee. ‘I came back to substitute for myself in the school, for a little, if it may be. For he has been called away. He had to go to Calcutta, for awhile. Miss Bhose wrote to his people. And

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

the storm broke. They demanded that he bring me down there. But why should I go to Bengal, so far, to be scolded? My duty was plainly to come and help Miss Bhose through the exams. You tell them, I said to him, that my loyalty to her doesn't allow me to take a trip just for pleasure at this time.'

'Have you seen your mother? Have you seen Miss Bhose?'

'My mother I have seen. I'm going to Miss Bhose's house from here, to see her after she comes from school. I thought I ought not to go to the school in this, it would break up the classes, I thought, maybe.' And she lifted a fold of her sari. 'He gave it to me, of course,' she added, apologizing for its silkenness. 'I went to him without a pice, almost. And this wrist-watch he gave me. Isn't it sweet, Miss Sahib? It's going, too,' and she unselfishly lifted it to Davida's ear.

Davida looked at her. The costume she was wearing the Westerners can understand by looking in the article on India, in Miss Bhose's encyclopædia, Plate II, Figure 4, an illustration drawn by Lockwood Kipling. Some twelve or fifteen yards of thin *café au lait crêpe de Chine*, with a small flower of the same shade woven in it, with a little border of gold braid, not woven in, but sewn on, was wrapped about her liteness — Taj managed these things well — so that there was more fullness about her feet, than there is in the illustration — and less about her hips. Her blouse was of sheer white cotton, long-sleeved. Now when she had disappeared she had been wear-

ing cotton garments like those in Figure 5, of Plate I, except that the lower garments were more shapely about the ankle, and the veil which was too thin, was supposed to hide the shirt and fall to the knees. The sari, in the thoughts of the women of the North was essentially Parsi, and, like the Englishwomen's, a costume of free women, unveiled, independent, and yet a costume Indian and nationalistic. Was it for that reason, Davida wondered, that Taj had adopted it — or because it was the dress of his Bengali women-folk? Or, was it because, without a mirror, she had known how it would become her? Anyway, there she sat, going on from the depth of her contentment, in her gentle murmur of a voice.

'You I shall tell everything, from the beginning. Last summer — last spring it was, as I left Miss Bhowe's one day, with my mother — she was called back for a minute, and as I waited, he whispered in my ear, as he passed, "Marry me!" But I was shocked, and turned my back quickly, quickly. Then he wrote me letters. Many letters. Before I answered one of them, I wrote to him that if it was an honourable suit, why didn't he go with it to you or my mother, or Miss Bhowe? Because they would have put an end to it, he said. He wrote me how the English do these things — as if I didn't know that already! Those letters made my mother's house seem lonely, Miss Sahib. But I wrote to him to say strongly that it was impossible, a scandal. He answered vehemently. Then I wondered why I had gone on living in the basti, after all decent people had

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

left it. And then – I don't know how it was – but the school just went away from me. It got to going away far from me, and I would be left alone there in the classroom, and the pupils would be like little specks of dust on the horizon. Perhaps it happens so to the English who make their own arrangements? And then – after awhile – he got a new job, a very good job, as head master. And he wrote that he had told them he would be there on a certain date with his family, and he must have a house, and some days to settle in. And what could I do then, Miss Sahib, because he hadn't any family but me! He told me the train to take, and everything, and the pastor would marry us. So then – when that letter came – I shut my door, and knelt down to pray, in distress. Oh God, what shall I do? I asked. Then a voice came into my heart: God is love – God is love! Miss Sahib,' demanded Taj, looking curiously into Davida's face, 'why does it say, "God is love? – God is love"? Love is God, then! It was a song in my heart. But they say it is dirty. They say it is sin. How can that be? I asked him. He understands it. Miss Sahib, do you believe it? Do you believe that God is love?'

'Well,' said Davida, 'yes.'

'And who abides in Love, abides in God. The Gospel says so. But even then, at first, though my heart was full of love – God is love – and my mother too was going away from me – getting like a little speck of dust away off – I didn't know how I could do it – get on the train, and go to him. I must have

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

a sign from God, I said. So then I met you. And you said to me, "Taj, if you don't marry, you will be sorry for it some day." I knew my mother had got you to do it. But I took it for a sign. I knew I was making for you trouble and anxiety. But I *had* to make you all trouble – or else him. Because if they should say to him arriving "Where's your family?" what could he then answer them? So I went and got on the train. But my heart failed me. And I thought of jumping out.'

'The train stopped. Why didn't you get out then?'

'I did. I got out at the first station. That's where he met me. This is what the English call eloped.'

'Oh, is it? Still, I think you might have told some of us, Taj.'

'I thought of that many times. But if you had known, and not stopped me, not told Miss Bhose, would she ever have forgiven you? I would have broken the school up. If my mother had known, they would never have forgiven her. I did write to my mother, and my brother, afterwards. Of course we never imagined that they wouldn't find out sooner. That was our good luck. Miss Bhose came to see us; very angry she was, too, and many things she said, being sometimes the victim of her tongue, the good old soul. But he answered her right. He said our fathers and our grandfathers deserted heaven and salvation to become Christian, cast aside pride and jumped naked into space for Christ's sake. And this unworthy generation sits in its little con-

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

ventions, afraid to move, he said. Why shouldn't I marry who I want to, without asking about caste? Did my grandfather ask about caste when he died to the Brahmins, being baptized? he asked her. And she couldn't answer, for once. But she will come again sometime, to see us, I hope. And you will come, Miss Sahib; when will you come and see our nice little house?"

"I don't know exactly."

"Come soon! Come soon! It is a small house, but on the very edge of the city, so the air is fresh. And we have a drawing-room, with a large carpet on it, and an English tea set of china cups. And I am making little covers and scarfs as fast as I can. And I pour tea for his friends out of my teapot, like the English do. And we walk out together, me in this pretty sari. Like the English we walk out. One evening we saw the D.C. and his memsahib walking together in the dusk. And he said, "Take hold of my arm on the street, as the English do, for it is proper." But I said, "She takes hold of his arm to steady her steps, for she is carrying his child. I won't cling to your arm in the street yet. Not yet," I said. But he likes English ways. We talk English. He knows it all. Do you know what my name is in English? It means "crown." I am a crown in English. I am what makes a man king! But Taj in Urdu is just a common silly name. I want you to come and meet him. He says, "You married me English, and I'll treat you English." When will you come, Miss Sahib?"

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'I'll come when Miss Bhose does.' The sari had fallen back, and Davida sat stroking Taj's hair.

Her face drooped, momentarily. •

'It's difficult, going to Miss Bhose. How can I explain to her about it? I can't tell *her* my Persian class just went away from me, before the exam. She wouldn't understand, the poor old thing. I've not gone back to the basti. I and my mother are staying with the pastor. That will please her. And I'll offer to teach for a while, if she'll have me,' said Taj, humbly.

'For how long?'

'Well, I don't know. I'll say two weeks. He may be gone two weeks.'

'But suppose he comes back sooner – in four or five days?'

Taj smiled, then. Or the memory of many little kisses hovered smiling on her red lips. She turned her face away, and held a fold of her silk at arm's length, as if she was considering that. Then she let it fall and turned demurely to Davida.

'A woman's place,' she said, 'is in her home. In that case I would go home with him.'

She went serenely away to Miss Bhose's, leaving Davida stricken again of an old passion – sick unto death, she felt. Life, of a sudden, wasn't good enough. It wasn't worth while. 'A woman's place,' said Taj, unutterably glad of her conviction, 'is in her home.' 'But I am homeless,' said Davida. 'I have no place in the world. How cosily love wrapped her round! But I am naked, uncovered. I can't let

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

her, that naughty little native sweeper, stir me up all through and through again. What do I care if she marries. They marry every day. They love easily. Anybody'll do for them. Perhaps I'm abnormal. There must be another man like mine, somewhere in the world. But where could I find him? Oh, Lord, oh my Master, this isn't good enough for me!' she prayed. 'I'm tired of being allied with that which does provide, and not partake,' she said. 'I want to sit down and eat with the rest of them. A woman's place – how sweet that is, when a woman says it, rejoicing. I have no place in this world. Oh God, take me out of it.'

After all, women do die. Mary Kincaid died last year of small-pox. And Mary Hood the year before of cholera. And Ethel Frank of fever. Maybe I'll die, too. After all, I'm thirty-five. And in ten years more I'll be forty-five, and the worst of it will be over. After all, this is God's will, some way. The will of God is perfect. God is love. That reminds me of Taj. Taj says a woman's place –

'I'll meet you at the court at ten o'clock,' John Ramsey had said. So promptly, by the fastest clock, Davida and Miss Bhose arrived in her trap. It seemed to Davida that every group in the great open space there, ceased talking to stare at her. It was a great crowd – and silence had fallen upon it – and men stood aside hostilely, she felt, to make a way for her. And John Ramsey was coming towards her – he was receiving her – as was his way – in state, and leading her into that bungalow. Every week

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

for years she had passed that building – without even a thought. She never before had seen the inside of it.

It was only a whitewashed room. It was nearly full of men – she looked at none of them, but she knew they were pompous and important individuals. 'This is where the witnesses sit,' Ramsey was saying to her, 'that's the judge's place, there is where the prisoners will be.' Why should she feel excited, ashamed, as if she were a prisoner? To come and see a session of the court – that was what an American woman who knew nothing about the place would have enjoyed. But Davida, who knew what they were saying about her, what they were calling to one another without a word, what they were thinking – nothing could have persuaded her to endure the ordeal – nothing but Miss Bhose.

The judge, she was thinking, the judge – it all depends on the judge. When there had been an English D.C. in the district, she used sometimes to be asked to dine at his house with the visiting judge. But the judges of late couldn't be bothered with dinner, the doctor's wife said. Davida hadn't seen one even for some time. It all depends on the judge – how he treats John Ramsey.

Everybody was rising. The judge was coming in through the door at the back – or was it the front? – of the room. He sat down, and at the sight of him Davida was comforted. But what sort of Englishman is this? she wondered.

An old-looking man, without a wig, without a

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

gown, a beautiful, round, bald-headed, sweet-mouthed man. His forehead was high. The crown of his head was polished rosily. From the top of his head to his ears were two closely cropped brushes of stiff white hair. His cheeks were like puffing cherubs'. But his mouth—it was his mouth that Davida stared at. If my fate ever depends on a mouth, may it be that mouth, she thought, so firm, so kind, so well-ordered, so neat, so very—what should she say?—so very—adequate for righteousness, that beautiful mouth.

Fascinated, she sat watching his hands arrange the papers on his desk, neat little hands, moving economically, with precision. The P.O. was setting out the case for the State. The story of the crimes, the story of their detection, of the piling up of the evidence, and then—he began to talk of John Ramsey. It was their luck to have, to prove their case, no ordinary bought-and-sold witness. Here he was, a thoroughly disinterested American, whose integrity had been a proverb in the town for nearly thirty years. Time after time, when the Indians had been unable to find a man of themselves to entrust with public funds, they had trusted them unquestioningly to this missionary. Here he had been, without any gain to himself, from the highest possible religious motives, caring for the poor and depressed. (You might suppose the Police Sahib was a bishop, Davida thought.) And running to help an unknown person who cried for his help, as he had run about to relieve distress all his life—he fell into this nest of desper-

adoes. How they treated him would be all shown. How he had gone away, unsuspecting, in the uprightness of his life, their character, that would be shown. How it had become his duty to tell the police what he knew – that, too, would be shown.

Davida, sitting next to him, felt the agony of John Ramsey's embarrassment. He had to sit still there, helpless, while aliens were praising his shame, boasting for their unsympathetic purpose of his hidden adorations, holding up to the view of the hostile the ardour of his worship. She was glad she had come, for without her he would have been alone there among his critics. They were alone together there, as always, the missionaries, cut off by distances from their countrymen, who thought them fools, living among Englishmen who called them Americans and nuisances, among Moslems who called them infidels and Hindus who called them pariahs, among Christians who called them foreigners. The judge there, sitting looking intently at Ramsey, was a white man, and a little white man, and a good little white man. But he was not like Ramsey – as different from Ramsey as a man might well be. Ramsey was a thin tidy little old Scotchman, partly bald, too, with bits of ruddy greying hair brushed neatly across the bare spot, his exquisitely fine girlish skin, not pink, but like thin parchment over blue, all wrinkled about the corners of his fearless eyes. He had on his best suit and the necktie his Emma had sent him for Christmas.

He was called to the witness-stand.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

David, sitting close against Miss Bhose, saw her brother standing there and grew tense with poignant sympathy, understanding him. *He* wasn't close to anyone. He was apart from them all. Irrevocably aloof, he stood looking over that room full of men, wistfully, she thought, as if from across a great gulf. She was glad, at the first thought of it, that the distance separating him from them was so great, greater, it seemed to her than the whole earth, greater than all things measurable. She gave a glance around the room and saw it all without meeting an Indian eye — saw all those soft, unresisting, acquiescing faces which made her sparse brother look more stubbornly Scotch, more spiritually aggressive, more than ever a doughty old idealist ready to fight to the last ditch for his thin little lovely dream. Those darker, more exuberant, beautiful men, whose climate it was, they sat looking just what they were, sons, spiritual or physical, of languid philosophers who, lest the desires of the flesh divert their minds from God, hasten to satisfy them as soon as they arise.— their one hurry — so that they may turn again uninterrupted to their tropical contemplation of the impersonal Vague. And Ramsey looked just what he was, a son of covenanting Scotch who had died rather than submit to the alteration of one word in their prayer to their defined and charted God, of Puritan New Englanders who had defied wildernesses, grappled barefisted with blizzards, and kicked the conquered elements out of their path. Philosophies and religions and politics and wars had sifted and separated

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

and classified men, and divided them into camps of strangers eyeing one another suspiciously.

Miss Bhose moved in her chair, and Davida felt her motion and exulted suddenly. For women, she thought, are not separated. Here I am, shoulder to shoulder with Miss Bhose, not an inch, not a hair's breadth between us. I am one always with Begum. I am Taj all over again. Nothing can divide women. Philosophies and religions and politics and wars, all those really negligible things have never diverted us from our one productive and united purpose. All knit into one defensive passivity, we go on undisturbed the world over, in spite of all maddened male activity, worshipping with one heart our little teeth-cutting gods, repeating our creeds of baby-talk, the women of the East as definite and concrete as a new-born child, the women of the West as speculative and vague as the baby's future, and the more veiled we are towards men, the more naked we are to one another. So I am with my own, my very own, chuckled Davida inwardly. But the poor old Sahib — standing there aloof — a terrible price he pays for his inheritance of precious scruples.

Where, they asked the witness, had he first seen the prisoner? Why had he been in that room? In what condition? Why had he been unconscious? Could he identify the man who had struck the blow? He said he could not. Tell us exactly how they mistreated you. The judge interrupted: 'I must understand this thoroughly. Did they spit in your face?'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'Yes, sir.'

'How many times?'

'I can't say, sir — I can't remember that.'

'About how many? Twice, perhaps, or twenty?'

'Four or five times, perhaps, sir.'

'Your hands were tied behind your back?'

'Yes, sir.'

The counsel resumed.

'And this prisoner, when you regained consciousness, was the man who began reminding you of your duty?'

'Yes.'

'There is no doubt in your mind at all about it?'

'None at all.'

'And you forgave them because of your religious principles?'

Yes, thought Davida, he would have to bring that in! He can't let natives think any normal white man would have let such an insult pass. The judge was breaking in again:

'I must understand this clearly. You mean to say, Mr. Ramsey, that you forgave these men all that — spitting because of the example of our Lord at His Crucifixion?'

'Our Lord, he said!' Davida exulted. Of course, English do call Jesus that, just conventionally. Still —

'No, sir,' said John Ramsey flatly.

'No, sir? What do you mean? You didn't do it because of our Lord?'

'No, sir.'

'Why did you do it, then?'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'To get out of there. I didn't forgive them in the least in my heart. I was very angry. I was mad. I wanted to get away alive.'

'Is that the only reason?' asked the judge.

'Yes, sir,' declared Ramsey.

The judge put out his hand to delay the proceedings. He sat looking straight at Ramsey.

Ramsey turned his eyes away. He threw back his head with dignity and looked at the ceiling. There was a window high up in the wall, of course, almost at the roof. A shaft of light came from it and fell on Ramsey's face, so that every little transparent wrinkle about his eyes showed clearly.

'Really – sir –' said the judge, protesting –

His hand was stretched out for silence. No one in the room moved, except Ramsey, who looked again, straight, unflinchingly, at the judge.

The judge had called him 'sir'! He had spoken with the intention of making every one in the room understand that he honoured his humility.

And Davida, there, in her seat, gave a little sputter, a choked attempt to repress laughter half hysterical. It was too funny! Not a man in the room believed what John Ramsey said. For thirty years he had preached about the truth and now, when he, under oath, declared the less noble of two motives had been his, not a man in the room believed him.

The two men were still looking directly at one another. The judge's silencing hand fell, dramatically. The counsel went on:

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'When you made the promise, you didn't know who they were?'

'I hadn't the least idea.'

'If you had—if you had known they were criminals, you wouldn't have made the promise?'

'I don't know.'

'Let me understand this,' the judge interrupted: 'You would not have promised not to give information about men whom you knew were criminals?'

'Perhaps I would have. I don't know what I might have promised—sworn to, even—to save my life. I have four children, sir.'

But was it true that he refused to swear to save his life?

It was true.

'Why?' said the judge. 'You took an oath just now.'

It was galling to Ramsey, and he answered nervously—somewhat hastily—

'I get so tired of men who have to swear—of men who can't make themselves believed! I get so *tired* of them, sir!'

'So do I, Mr. Ramsey! So do I!' said the judge heartily. 'Yet you broke your promise. You wouldn't swear to save your own life, but you broke your promise to save a lady's life—because you *thought* you were saving a lady's life?'

Davida writhed to feel those curious insinuating eyes looking at *her* now. She ought never to have come here, come for Miss Bhose—

'Yes, sir.'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'That, too, was a part of your duty, of your religious duty, Mr. Ramsey?' asked the counsel.

'I thought so at the time.'

'You had reason to suppose she might that moment be in danger from them?'

'I had, sir.'

'You could not have justified yourself if you had delayed giving the information a minute, if you had delayed in the least?'

'No, sir.'

'If you had found out some other way that these men who forced you to give your promise were criminals, if no lady had been involved, you would have considered it your duty as an American gentleman to give the police this information? Would you not? It is not your belief that a promise made in ignorance of its real significance is of any value?'

'I can't say what I would have done, sir. I—probably would have—informed the police.'

'Exactly.'

They began cross-questioning him. They were like children then, playing at pushing over some enormous cliff of rock.

'The room in the village house was lighted, of course, by a native wick?'

'When they took me in, it was. When I came to, that man was holding a lantern over me.'

'What sort of lantern?'

'An ordinary—foreign lantern.'

'The sort we buy in bazaars here?'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

‘Yes.’

‘Is it likely that in a remote village they had such a lantern, Mr. Ramsey?’

‘I don’t say it is likely. I say they had it. It was well trimmed, too. Besides, I saw him in the light of the morning. He walked a little way out of the village with me in daylight.’

They asked –

‘Why were you so concerned for the safety of the lady, Mr. Ramsey?’

‘After what I knew of them, why should I not be concerned?’

‘You suspected the Indian young lady, the teacher, might have been detained there, but you didn’t hurry the police out for that reason. Why was that?’

‘I didn’t suspect she had been kidnapped. I thought it most improbable. Besides, I wasn’t responsible for her in any sense. She wasn’t in my charge.’

‘Oh, the American lady is in your charge. Explain to us exactly what your relation to the lady is.’

That second the judge tapped on the table sharply with a pencil.

‘What do you mean by that question?’ he asked the barrister.

‘I mean, sir, the matter isn’t plain to us. I wish to know –’

‘It’s perfectly plain to me. Be careful what insinuations you make about ladies in my court.’

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

The Indian turned suavely to Ramsey.

'Have you any objections to explaining your relationship?'

'Not in the least.'

'But I won't have it!' interrupted the judge. 'We take it for granted that any Englishman – any American – in the Station would have been under obligation to go to the rescue of any lady of his – family – of his race – in such a danger.'

They tried incriminating Jalal.

'You did not offer him fifty rupees if he persuaded the Moslem maulvie to submit to baptism in the village basti?'

'I did not.'

'We have here the letter in his writing, saying that you had made the promise. How do you account for that?'

'You are better at that sort of thing, more familiar with the processes, than I am,' said Ramsey, not maliciously or resentfully, as he would have made any other obvious statement.

But when it came to the cross-questioning of Miss Bhose, the atmosphere grew thundery. She stood there heavily, grandly, looking down her upper lip at the counsel, a fat, sleek barrister, a man whom she had long disliked, her hands clasping her umbrella defensively. 'I suggest,' he said finally, 'that you got this woman to support you in this kidnapping story in order to hide the fact that the teacher married your nephew.'

Miss Bhose appealed cunningly to the judge.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'Don't let them bring my teacher into this, either. For them to mention a woman spoils her reputation. That's why I can't get teachers. They are afraid of the publicity.'

He ruled that the matter was pertinent, and the squabbles began again. She would give no answer that didn't taunt them. She hit them in all their tender places and the judge refused to defend them. 'We're not Hindus! We cherish our widows! We don't make them prefer death by burning to what we otherwise will subject them to! Wasn't the teacher old enough to marry? Why should I approve of the marriage? We don't marry our small girls to men five times their age! We don't want puny children born of infants!' 'Will you answer my questions?' 'I am answering them to the best of my ability for your profit and good.' 'Don't preach to us!' 'God knows you need it, the way you treat women.' They dropped the matter of the marriage and she sailed down from the witness-stand triumphantly, scorning their politics, their religion, above all their sex, with every gesture, with her eyes, her head, the very grasp she had on her umbrella.

And it was this mountain of adequacy I came here to support with my timid shrinking presence, Davida thought, as she rose to leave with her. Ramsey was seeing them out. The Police Sahib was coming with him. A dozen of the town's mighty men who had been listening followed—in the veranda they were gathering about Ramsey, shaking his hand. Davida heard one of them say, 'Your

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

religion sounded good to-day, Sahib.' He said, 'Excuse me a moment. I will be back,' and turned from them to lead Davida to her trap.

The crowd waiting about in the open space was rising at the sight of the Sahibs, stirring about to ask the news. Ramsey was making a path through them for the ladies. They had come in the brilliant white sunlight to where the trap waited in the thick shade of a banyan tree. The Police Sahib had spoken civilly to Miss Bhose, and Davida was saying softly to Ramsey, 'It all went very well, better for us than I ever hoped it would' – she would have been off in another second –

The crowd had fallen away from around them at the sight of the Police Sahib. But three lads in their ignorance had drawn near, village lads, staring at the white lady with their mouths open. Farmer lads, they were, young shepherds, from the most remote regions, shaggy, long-haired, without turbans, with silver necklaces about their strong necks. The older two had their hair parted in the middle like women, and one of them had curls about his ears. They were standing behind the Police Sahib, with their arms around each other's necks, staring open-mouthed at Davida. The third was a lad of ten, naked to the waist, his head shaven close, except for a long bunch that had been allowed to grow suddenly out from one side of his head to keep away the evil eye. He stood with his hands on his hips, peering eagerly at the foreigners. Then he turned to his elders, speaking loud in Panjabi –

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'Which is the Padre Sahib? Which is the Sahib who lies?'

'The little Sahib,' the two answered together.

Ramsey turned in a flash. The Police Sahib turned.

'Get out!' he cried at them. 'Get away!'

They fled.

But Davida looked at Ramsey, regretted the glance, and started the horse off.

Pierced, he was, and wounded.

He would never get over that. Standing there with the notorious police officer. 'Which of the two? The little Sahib.'

'I'll never write that to Emma!' said Davida.

She had agreed with her brother to write to Emma that week the whole wretched tale, knowing that if they didn't she would be sure to hear of it in some vague disturbing way. Ramsey made that his excuse for refusing her invitation for dinner. He came along on his bicycle at dusk, and Davida, seeing how tired and low-spirited he was, cried to him –

'I don't want you going home to that bungalow and having dinner alone to-night! You stay here with me! I'll have Miss Bhose over.'

But he had to write to Emma that night, and it was a job he had been dreading. 'Do you think we must tell her they – spit on me?'

'She'll be sure to hear it some way. We can't let her think we aren't telling her it all.' That was what she had said every time they had discussed it. He wouldn't stay.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

'I must get it off my mind to-night,' he said.

And away he went. He wouldn't have any fire in his study. He would be sitting there with his scruples and his shame, far into the night, his overcoat collar turned up about his ears – sitting there writing her a love-letter, his heart so burning warm that he would forget for a little how cold his feet were. And she, alone by her fire, sat thinking of Emma – how she would read the letter to her children. The silly young things would probably be enough of Americans by this time to resent the fact that their father was a missionary. Well, she would settle them, she, their Aunt Davida Baillie.

She wrote pages and pages, beginning at the December pay-day. She took all the blame for the raid on the village. 'And when he sat here telling me about that night, how they mocked and buffeted him, he seemed more like Jesus to me than any man I ever saw or heard of – except perhaps St. Francis. If only you could have seen him standing there in the court-room! The Police Sahib, of course, had had it all arranged to prove that white men couldn't be safely touched in this district. And the judge intended to show those Indians how he honoured a man who wouldn't lie. And we all thought from the way he began that he was going to give an address then and there. But he only repeated, "Really, sir!" and sat there, letting us wait. I suppose he thought he couldn't say more. Anyway, he didn't. And when they said he was called the Sweeper's Sahib commonly, you should have seen him. He was the

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

sweetest old thing – I don't know where the English ever got him! He just screwed up his sweet little mouth and grinned at the Sahib. "The Sweeper's Sahib!" he said, chuckling all over. "What high titles they do give you, Mr. Ramsey!" And, of course, all the high-castes knew that he was spoofing them. And then in the end I could hardly keep from shouting with laughter. There he was, under oath, and when he said he hadn't acted from the highest possible motive, everybody knew he was lying, after he had preached all these years about the sin of it. I tell you, young John Ramsey, you had better watch your step if you want a face like your father's. For when he stood there, he looked absolutely like a beautiful old white angel among those filthy men. He shone. All his goodness just shone and sparkled out from him. And that was because it was inside of him all the time, and just got a chance to get out once. And I'm sorry you missed it.'

Ah well, that would do for the children. They wouldn't care much in any case. He was only their father. But he was Emma's husband. And then Davida heard Emma groaning over that letter. 'Why couldn't the woman write to me what I want to know? What do I care how his face shone? I could make it shine any time. What about the kitchen? How is his colour? How's his digestion?' Davida felt so guilty, realizing Emma, that she jumped up suddenly and called the watchman.

'Go and tell the Sahib's cook to come here at once

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

and bring the bread-mixer with him. Tell him to hurry!’

She waited, knowing very well what the delay meant. There would be a tremendous scrubbing going on in the cook-house. She had promised Emma faithfully to inspect the intricate machine often. And she hadn’t thought of it for weeks. She couldn’t help it. She couldn’t be thinking about kitchens and food and schools and the gospel of Jesus Christ all at once. She was sorry. But she just couldn’t.

After a long time the cook came. Each part of the bread-mixer was bright and clean. But Davida scolded him.

‘I told you to bring it to me every week for me to look at. Why didn’t you bring it sooner?’

‘I forgot.’

‘Well, don’t let me hear of your forgetting it again,’ she said severely. And then, without a scruple, she began writing –

‘Of course you, Memsahib, will be wanting to know if I am obeying orders about the bread. And I am. I think it’s simply delicious. And as for the mixer, you’ll be glad to know that I see that it’s kept as shining clean as it was under your regime. As for colds, he hasn’t had one for weeks, and every time he has fever I send him your soup at once. And I mustn’t forget to tell you that he had on to-day the necktie you sent him for Christmas. He had you as much as he could get you.’

Cold it was that night as she sat by the fire. But by the end of the week, by that Saturday noon when

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

she sat on the veranda with her friends, the spring sun was so hot that she felt it burning her feet through her leather shoes. She moved her chair back into the shade and sighed. Miss Bhose—if her enemy the barrister could have seen her then!—all deflated and shrivelled, basking limply in an old deck-chair, repeated the sigh, and increased it. And Begum, who was leaning against a pillar, her trousered legs stretched out into the sunshine, without realizing that she was doing it, took up that sigh and from the depth of her unconsciousness perfected it, stretching it out and out, unfathomably, into a cosmic Indian sigh, unhampered by any light Western optimism. They had been discussing that depressing subject, the long sentences passed on the kidnappers. Some of them had even been sent over the black waters to the distant penal colony, and Begum had been wondering what would become of their families. Davida had said that John Ramsey intended seeing that none of them starved. At that Miss Bhose had bestirred herself. ‘He had better administer his charity through you, then. They’ll be saying next that he put the men in jail to get possession of their wives if he doesn’t.’ ‘They wouldn’t say that!’ Davida had protested. And Begum, smiling indulgently at such naiveté, had confirmed Miss Bhose. ‘You don’t know us people, Miss Sahib. They can’t help saying about the Sahib what they’d do themselves.’ And then she had jumped up with justifiable impatience and rushed out of the veranda towards her children.

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

For Bobby was insisting on holding the baby so that her feet were in the water that trickled along in the little canal on the far side of the driveway bordering the veranda. The child had started to howl lustily and her sister was trying to pull her away from The Glamour of Paradise, who relaxed his grim hold of her head only when Begum began to cuff his ears. She gave the soothed infant to the little girl and came back to her place at Davida's feet.

'Look at them fighting!' she said. 'Even the children! Miss Sahib, how long will it be now till the government of God comes to this world?'

'I don't know, Begum.'

'But haven't you just some idea? Why should they quarrel and fight—even babies? Why should we all hate one another? The Kingdom of God is peace—righteousness, joy and peace, it says. I get tired waiting for it. How long must we wait now?'

'It is an old question, Begum.'

Davida wanted to console her. The last ten days they had seen each other daily. 'It is like it used to be when you taught me to read,' Begum had said, tearfully. 'And now we are going far away, and I shall not see you. And we don't know the Miss Sahibs that will be there, but they won't be you. And they won't really know the children ever, not having seen them, as you have, the day they were born. If only it had been safe to stay near! But I would not let him. "Let us go very far away for the children's sake," I said.' They were leaving on Monday. Jalal had had a wide choice of new work. A teacher like

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

him every missionary in India wanted to grab at once.

So now Davida said –

‘We don’t know how long, Begum. But we can think how – nice it will be then.’

‘Yes. I know it. I was saying that to the Father of Bobby just last night. He doesn’t weep with his eyes; only with his heart and liver. I said to cheer him up – “Think how sweet it would be if Jesus would come and govern the world, and live in the Police Sahib’s bungalow, and we would be His disciples. And He would send us out, as the Police Sahib does, in blue uniform and scarlet turban – through all the villages, two by two – not with clubs, but maybe with a little quinine tied in the end of the men’s turbans, and zinc ointment for the sores, and some little books of songs for the children to make them laugh, and maybe a few hollyhock seeds for their gardens. And we could go too, when He went with them. And He would gather us in to sing in church the new songs instead of putting us into prison. And we would all love one another, and not fight or try to break down doors. Think how sweet that would be,” I said to him, because his eyelids too were weary.’

Miss Bhose sat up. She spoke bitterly. Taj had gone away again after teaching seven days. Her husband had come for her and she had gone to him like an arrow to its mark. ‘She never really cared to teach. She just came and got herself publicly reinstated and went away again. All she cares for is

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

a man and a baby. What can you do with such teachers, such pupils?' she had asked Davida just before Begum and her untidy flock had arrived to interrupt the languishing Persian lesson. She sat up now, caught by Begum's Utopian flight, and asked sharply –

'He would live in the Police Sahib's bungalow?'

'I was supposing that.' Begum's little vision was dimmed by her tone.

'An Englishman?'

'Of course. Or an American.'

'With a sun-hat on?'

'Well –'

'How could He come,' Miss Bhose cried scornfully, 'to a land like this? Could He come as a Hindu, so that the Moslems would despise Him? Or a native Christian, so that they both would spit on Him? Or a Jew, so that the three would crucify Him? Or an Englishman, so that everybody could revile Him together? How would He come? Tell me that! India had Buddha once! What happened then?'

She asked it dramatically of Begum, who answered as wisely as she could.

'What's Buddha?'

Miss Bhose turned helplessly towards Davida.

'*There* it is! *There* you have it! What's Buddha? they ask now. His name is forgotten! My sister,' she said, speaking gently, 'Buddha was a Saviour who came to India. A sort of Saviour. But they kicked him out. His name is forgotten!'

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

Begum clicked her tongue apologetically.

'You must forgive me. I am but an ignorant woman. I hadn't heard of him before. Who kicked him¹ out? To kick out a Saviour—that's very wicked.'

'My people, the Brahmins. They couldn't stand his good teaching. They made the memory of him to perish.'

'It's too bad,' said Begum, sympathetically. 'I'm sorry I didn't know that. The Miss Sahib never told me. I suppose she hadn't time, after teaching me so many things.'

'That's where our future is! That's where our salvation is—back there with Buddha—before him.' She was started now. Davida was too listless to interpose. 'We are too old—this land is—for salvation. Don't you see it? They talk about it, day and night, till my ears flag, all the young, about the future of our mother India. Our grandmother, they might well say, our great-great-grandmother, the poor old crazy corpse! I ache for them! I pity them! Wanting it to be young again! Look at me! Don't I want to be young again? I can't believe I'm so old. The Encyclopædia is but come, and my years are *spent, lived, consumed, passed away*. And I shall go on, tottering—tottering and shaking, and my servants will be holding me up lest I fall into the fire, soon now; I shall go cursing my servants as the young go reviling the Government, and dying—dying—with my last breath—so'—she gave a dramatic gasp—'dying, I shall go vowing I am young, with a future

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

before me, young enough to race with anyone. Oh, what a disgusting, slobbering, rotten old corpse of a nation we are! And shall Jesus come to us?’

‘I was only saying – how nice it would be if it did come, the glorious kingdom.’

‘Well, I’m not sure of that either. Sometimes I think the Kingdom of Heaven is too near now to suit me – all these – mercies – these – Christian justnesses.’ And she sighed, a vast and tremendous sigh. ‘It would be all very fine for you, my sister,’ she said wistfully. ‘Of such as you was always His Kingdom!’

The children were coming in to their mother. They dumped the baby unceremoniously down in her lap. She lifted her one upper garment and cuddled it down against her bare breast to nurse and took both its tiny bare feet in her hand. Then she kissed its little bald head, slowly, a long time.

And Miss Bhose, studying her, sighed again.

‘Anyway, I know one thing,’ Begum resumed dreamily. ‘If He came, I would adore Him. I would go through the fields preaching and teaching with Him. If He came,’ she added, growing more earnest, ‘Miss Sahib, I would wash His feet with my tears and dry them with my hair. And I would never cease to kiss His feet! *Never!*’

‘I would fall down, too, and worship Him!’ Miss Bhose was all but weeping with discouragement. ‘I would kiss His feet. But rising, *you* know what I would be thinking of, Miss Sahib! I would be wondering, even as I got up, who this man’s mother

DAUGHTERS OF INDIA

was — as I knelt, I would be thinking of his grandfather's caste!

Bobby at that moment ceased hastily pulling his sister's hair, and to hide his iniquity, as his mother lifted her hand to smack him, spoke devoutly, sitting there cross-legged on the veranda matting, chubby, brown-eyed, pillow-clothed.

'Poor old Jesus!' he said. 'Got stuck up on a cross! Poor old Jesus!'

Begum turned to Davida.

'Do you hear that?' she whispered proudly. 'He's always repeating his father's sermons. He's going to be a preacher some day, that boy.'

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